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# THE PATH OF HUMILITY

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# THE PATH OF HUMILITY

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"SPIRITUAL PROGRESS," ETC.

"Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart,"

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE translation of this brilliant and penetrating study of humility has been a task of extreme delicacy and no small difficulty. The spiritual genius of the French is quite other than the spiritual genius of the English; it is impossible adequately to express the one in the terms of the other.

The translator therefore trusts that a certain unevenness of literary style will be generously overlooked, and that no one, on its account, will be deterred from studying a work that cannot fail to have a lasting and beneficent influence upon the whole spiritual life.

The translator also begs to tender warmest thanks to the Rev. William Forbes-Leith, S.J., and to the Rev. Roger Clutton, S.J., for their most kind and valuable help in the elucidation of obscure passages, and in the verification of texts and quotations.



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# THE PATH OF HUMILITY

## DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING THE BEST USE OF THESE EXERCISES

### I

1. CHOOSE a time when you will be able to give yourself to them freely and fully.

2. A whole month should be set apart for them, or more if you are so inclined. There is ample matter for two exercises a day. What is called a study, or explanation, may be used as a meditation, and in every case should be read with the greatest attention.

3. Mark your entrance upon this great work of reformation by some special acts of oblation and devotion. The evening before pay a visit to the church expressly for this purpose. Kneel before Jesus so humble in the Tabernacle. Recite slowly the "Veni Creator." Next, direct your steps to the altar of the Blessed Virgin. You may also invoke those Saints whose humility has most impressed you—S. Francis, S. Anthony of Padua, S. Francis de Sales, S. Vincent de Paul—and beg them to obtain for you light, goodwill, and perseverance.

### II

1. During the exercises, endeavour to preserve within yourself a feeling of humility, especially in

your intercourse with others; deepen this sentiment by frequent aspirations throughout the day; you will find matter for them in each meditation, and more especially in the Resolution or spiritual bouquet at the end of each. Depart as little as possible from this attitude of soul.

2. Make use also of exterior acts of abasement. Kiss the ground (if no one else is present); pray with the head bowed, in the posture of a guilty person full of confusion; speak in a quiet and restrained manner, and walk with less freedom. Try also to cultivate a spirit of poverty.

3. Seek occasions of obedience and of showing kindness, but do all with great simplicity. Do not contradict, argue, or dispute. Accept trials and contradictions as things fully deserved.

NOTE.—Use these three last suggestions, or one of them, as a daily subject for the particular examen.

## A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

HUMILITY! The whole Christian tradition exalts it, and every pious soul is ambitious to acquire it. Jesus, by associating it with His sufferings, raised it to the level of the Cross, and placed it as an aureole around the Blessed Sacrament.

Where there is no humility there is little virtue, for God only enters a soul in which humility makes room for Him.

But it is not enough to praise and admire this virtue, we must have light and full conviction if we are to make it our own. Our ideas and our consciences need illumination, for if the nature of humility is little known, still less is the range of its influence understood.

The meditations in this book are meant for those who seriously wish to understand, and for pious souls who are eager to make progress.

Great things are always deeply hidden; precious metals are found buried in the earth; prodigious forces sleep in quiet matter; marvellous mechanical powers are at work in the silent movement of the stars, and in the depths of living beings we catch sight of secrets so profound that they are inexplicable.

And when we come to the examination of humility we see that it is a supernatural virtue whose depths are infinite.

Virtue considered as a whole is a living organism, and each particular virtue is one of its members. Each has its own special beauty, but it is also clothed with the beauty of its sisters, because of the unity of their life and their dependence upon one another. Some virtues, however, participate in that life in a more intimate, full, and continuous manner; the same life animates each part of the whole, even the meanest, but it cannot expand and flourish there in the same degree. We are about to study the part assigned to humility; perhaps we shall discover a humility that we have never known before.

In order to proceed with confidence we must be thorough and methodical. We cannot reach the heights without first traversing an uninteresting region where there will be certain obstacles to overcome. To make the way less tedious we will have recourse to various means: the study of general outlines; short explanations which will lighten obscure points; reflections which will throw into relief the results of a discovery; and, above all, searching meditations which will bathe the soul in the atmosphere of truth—under the bright sunshine of grace.

Let no soul of goodwill be discouraged with the thought that these heights of truth are unattainable; let them rather remember the help they will receive from Heaven. Human science is confined to experts; the science of God is poured out upon the little and the humble, and these do not always need long and tedious reasonings. If they find parts of this book unintelligible to them, they need not be saddened or hindered on their way. The light is awaiting them, perhaps at a corner of the road, in a form more simple

but just as full of truth. To such souls some tiny word will at times come as a revelation.

Now we will make a rapid survey of the way along which we are to travel in this book. It will be sufficient to cast a glance first upon humility as a special virtue, and then upon the sphere of its influence.

## I.—HUMILITY AS A SPECIAL VIRTUE

### I.—PRIDE IS ONLY THE DEVIATION OF TWO PERFECTLY LEGITIMATE TENDENCIES

PRIDE exhibiting itself as a sense of superiority and a wish to shine may be nothing more than the recollection of our original greatness. If so, it is only wrong because out of place. A king deposed through his own fault, and proud in his misfortune—"a fallen god remembering heaven"—such, in that case, would man appear in his inclination to pride.

But pride as a disorder and a vice should rather be regarded as the stigma of a vanquished rebel than as the imprint of a lost crown. *Eritis sicut dii*. Thus temptation to pride becomes a trouble inherited in the blood, and this double origin may explain at the same time what is good in it and what is evil.

It is, however, more correct to regard this fault as a deviation from useful sentiments implanted by God Himself in human nature. In a final analysis these sentiments are reduced to two: self-esteem, and the desire for the esteem of others. Self-esteem is the basis of personal dignity; the desire for the esteem of others is one of the bases of social life.

These sentiments are so deeply rooted and so spontaneous that they pertain in a measure to the category

of instincts, and resemble those of self-preservation. They have, besides, functions of a similar nature; the instinct of life attaches man to an existence not always happy; that of self-esteem attaches him to his own personality, though it may not be worth much; while the desire for the esteem of others attaches him to the public weal despite the meagreness of the benefits it offers.

These two latter propensities are subject to deviations so easy and natural that they seem to bear the impress of the original fall. This is why the moralists often stigmatise them both indiscriminately as a vice.

## II.—HUMILITY IS THE VIRTUE CHARGED WITH THE MISSION OF COMBATTING THESE DEVIATIONS

"It is she who tempers the spirit and prevents it from exalting itself unduly."\* It is humility that must regulate and temper self-esteem and the desire for the esteem of others.

Humility is thus both truth and justice. Under the title of truth, it undertakes to direct us; under the title of justice, it inclines us to act conformably with such direction.†

As truth it resides in the intellect; as justice it dwells in the will. Now these two faculties act one upon the other, so that an increase of light not only enables the motives and rules of humility to be better understood, but also aids in their fulfilment.

Our meditations must, then, be directed towards

\* S. Thomas.

† The word "justice" is used here in a wide sense, and means the virtuous disposition which assures to each thing its proper place, in the same manner as justice in its strict sense adjusts the rights of men.



improving the condition of these two faculties. The most favourable condition of the will is inclination.

Two kinds of light produce conviction : the light of reason and that of revelation. Two forces produce inclination : desire and actual grace. We shall be wise if we avail ourselves of all these helps at one and the same time, but those of the supernatural order, since they are the highest, are the most effectual.

To rest satisfied with the light of reason in determining the esteem we deserve would be to establish an incomplete and insufficient virtue.

To attempt to acquire humility in our own strength would lead to nothing but disappointment.

The pagans knew humility only in the guise of modesty, and what they knew they practised very imperfectly. The true conception of this virtue emanates from our fundamental dogmas, and its perfect practice depends upon grace; it is therefore eminently supernatural, and thus understood the rationalist can neither conceive nor practise it.

We must, however, allow full scope to the natural faculties in the acquisition of this virtue, and in order clearly to understand the meaning of this observation, it will be well at this point to call to mind a few general ideas on the natural and the supernatural virtues.

Their object is the same—goodness; and both classes of the same virtue have the same special object—the same sort of goodness. Thus humility, whether natural or supernatural, regulates self-esteem and the desire for praise.

These virtues reside in the same faculties, which are, in both cases, the natural faculties. Natural virtues penetrate them, supernatural virtues elevate them.

But they are totally different in their mode of production and exercise.

The supernatural virtues are put into us by a species of creation, which Theology calls infusion; thus, supernatural virtue is synonymous with infused virtue. God pours such virtues into the soul of the baptised infant, and He pours them all in at the same time. The increase of one is the increase of all, and, with the exception of faith and hope, all may be lost together by mortal sin. Again, all are together revived by the recovery of grace.

The natural virtues, on the contrary, are acquired slowly by numerous acts, and they are only lost little by little, so that a mortal sin does not destroy them. The term habitual can thus only be applied to the latter. Inclination, strength, facility are acquired little by little, as in a limb which is exercised for a certain purpose.

With the supernatural virtues increase comes from without, and not by development; and in their case a degree of growth does not necessarily correspond with any increase of strength or inclination.

Theologians sum up this difference in two peculiar expressions. The infused virtues, they say, give the *simpliciter posse*, the simple power—what might be called aptitude; while habit gives the *faciliter posse*, or facility. Actual grace also gives it, but in a transitory manner.

A comparison will make these distinctions clear. A fabric may be fine or coarse, of close or open texture; it becomes purple when it is put into a special bath. The bath has not changed its nature in any way; the fabric remains fine or coarse, close or open, but it ranks

in a higher order. Its worth and its use are no longer the same. But treat it with a chemical which deprives it of its colour, and once more it becomes a common fabric.

The supernatural virtues elevate our being from the natural to the supernatural order; they transform our faculties and communicate to them along with a special beauty, an aptitude—but only an aptitude—to produce supernatural acts. Activity will come from actual graces, from dispositions of the will, and from habits.

We see from this that, generally speaking, in adults, virtue costs effort.

Supernatural virtues are not intended to render the natural forces inactive, or to replace them, but to elevate, to complete, and to sustain them.

By their presence they raise them to the supernatural order, and they complete and sustain them by the actual graces that they attract.

These actual graces offer us inestimable resources; God multiplies them a hundredfold in the soul that corresponds to them, and prayer induces Him to give them prodigally, without desert and without measure. Under their all-powerful influence virtuous acts are multiplied and accomplished with fervour; the natural faculties which produce them are improved and developed, and finally acquire inclination and facility for similar acts, and the state of habitual virtue is thus realised.

\* NOTE.—More complete explanations will be found in the book entitled "Spiritual Progress," by the same author.

## III.—THE IMPORTANCE OF CONVICTION TO HUMILITY

It is not so easy to distinguish, even theoretically, between pride and personal dignity.

Care for our reputation—the duty of keeping our rank or defending our principles—authorises a great many actions which may appear to ill-informed minds to be prompted by pride. And pride, on the other hand, may avail itself of these delicate precautions.

But considered in practice the distinction becomes even more difficult. In fact, nothing is so deceptive as this vice; it disguises and transforms itself, it slowly grows and spreads; when it has finally taken possession, it is scarcely noticed, and when noticed, it is excused.

Pride does not appear horrible. Its ugliness and malice strike us less than the ugliness and malice of other vices. It appears less dangerous to us, because, among Christians, pride rarely becomes a mortal sin, and because few of us carry this fault to extremes. Yet, nevertheless, its pernicious influence is such that the Saints call it the father of all the vices.

It is therefore necessary to impress upon our minds such a clear conviction as may excite in us a horror of pride, and induce us to rid ourselves of it.

A conviction of this kind is not virtue, but it includes it in the same manner as physical forces are found, ready for use, in their elements. Also, it is not to be acquired by vague, feeble, or exaggerated assertions. Let us try to reach the root of the matter beneath the overgrowth of conventional phrases which cluster about it.

At the same time we must not trust too much to the results of our own researches, nor our own analyses; God alone is the Doctor of humility,—“He reveals it to little ones.” “*Revelasti ea parvulis.*”

#### IV.—THE VALUE TO HUMILITY OF INCLINATION

Pride, so difficult to recognise, is still more difficult to conquer. Its roots are buried deep in our nature; its vitality is extreme; it springs up again when we supposed it dead; it nourishes itself on little, yet it is never satisfied.

Therefore, if we are to conquer it we must establish within ourselves the *habit* of humility, opposing this habit in daily, ceaseless conflict with the contrary tendency we cannot wholly eradicate.

And how can we acquire and develop this habit which is so repugnant to nature? Only by exercise.

Action—action, this is the great secret, this is the imperative need. Comprehension and conviction are the advance-guard—they clear the way; but it is the army which achieves the victory, the army of deeds, and especially of generous deeds. By these and these alone can humility be firmly established within us.

This means warfare. We must bow to the will of others, even when they are unreasonable. We must be kind to those who slight us. We must welcome every humiliation. Nature will rebel, but, governed by a resolute humility, she will employ her strength in self-conquest, and find her happiness in humbling herself with Jesus. *Mihi absit gloriari nisi in cruce Jesu Christi.*

And while awaiting the trials that life may hold in

store for us, we have at our command, as a preparation for them, the inexhaustible resource both of interior and exterior acts.

Numberless interior acts (desires, resolutions, prayers, acceptances, etc.) may be made; and if they are fervent nothing can withstand them; the whole soul should be put into these efforts, and this is the exercise we must strive to make during these meditations.

Exterior acts should not be neglected, for they give reality to our feelings. Why should we not employ them even during prayer? The humble attitude of a sinner, a suppliant, a beggar, will help us, and sometimes it is useful to kiss the ground.

By all these means, employed continuously for some time, our sentiments become something more than a mere assent of the intellect to the truth, or a simple determination of the will to embrace justice; this assent and this determination become *habits* rooted deeply and firmly within us.

These are a permanent force, giving facility, movements, and even relish; for it is in the nature of every force to incite to action, and to give satisfaction by its free exercise.

Let us, then, embark upon this enterprise with courage; making every effort, and counting upon the aid of grace.

If we are to become humble we must be convinced and resolute, we must reflect and we must pray.



## II.—THE GENERAL INFLUENCE OF HUMILITY

The influence of humility may be deduced from its very nature. We have seen that it is truth and justice; now truth illumines the mind, and justice rules the moral nature, and these comprise the whole man.

I. *Humility is truth.*— This is an accepted and constantly reiterated phrase, but yet it is often dimly understood. Truth! truth! it sounds very beautiful, but what truth is it that we are seeking here? It is the truth about ourselves. And how shall we learn it? By remembering that we are created beings, sinful beings, and beings who are participators in the divine life.

These are great truths, which cannot be apprehended by themselves. Before I can apprehend the created, I must first apprehend the Creator; before I can realise the heinousness of sin, I must first realise something of the rights and dignity of Him Whom I have offended; before I can grasp the amazing truth of that extraordinary phrase: "Participation in the divine life," I must learn something of the whole wondrous scheme of grace and glory.

In my search for truth I find God on every side, and if I am to understand myself I must know something of Him; I find Him in my origin and in my destiny, in the depths of my soul, and in my outward acts; if I seek to rid myself of Him I annihilate myself, and, on the other hand, I ennoble myself beyond measure if I open my heart to all that He is longing to give me.

From these suggestive contrasts spring two senti-

ments most valuable to my spiritual life: humility, from the consideration of what I am; adoration, from the contemplation of Him by Whom I am.

This double view embraces the whole truth; each part of the truth is seen in its right place and due proportion, and I am illumined by the most beautiful light that this world knows—the light of the Infinite enlightening the finite.

II. *Humility is justice.*—As truth, humility leads us to the beautiful; as justice, she leads us to the good. In establishing true relations between God and man, truth lays the foundations of justice; but in teaching us duty justice makes of truth a moral virtue. Now duty may be expressed as universal submission. Universal submission is the acceptance of every law, resignation in every trial, fidelity to every inspiration; by it God controls all our actions, and directs them to Himself, thus satisfying all the claims of justice. While He supplies the initiative of the Prime Mover, we render the obedience of the individual and free but subordinated being.

Let divine love, daughter of truth and justice, warm with its rays this faithful humility, and universal submission becomes universal love—grateful love to the supreme Benefactor, complacent love for the adored Being, benevolent love for the God Who wishes to receive something from us, zealous love for the advancement of His glory among men.

We can understand now why justice sums up the whole of virtue, and why, in the Scriptures, the Saints are called the just. Humility opens wide the gate that leads to perfection.

III. *Humility the transformer.*—May it not be pos-

sible to give to the two sentiments of which humility has the regulation and direction—self-esteem and the desire for praise—a higher aim than is usually theirs?

They are a force, and all force contains the latent power of movement. Man masters the torrent, and draws from it the amazing marvels of electricity. Let us, then, master our lively sentiment of personal esteem and the no less lively desire for the esteem of others, and direct their activity towards a more lofty end. Give them nobler objects of attainment, better rewards to win, and this sublimer aim will carry them beyond the reach of pride.

To this high effort at self-education every religious truth, every pious sentiment, every grace from on high, will give their aid, and this work will be the crown of humility. Better still, it will delight the Heart of God, and will give to ours a divine peace, and, it may be, an unexpected joy.

May Jesus, God made Man, appear to me, my Saviour, my Friend, my Brother, my Life; may He enlighten me by His example; may He exalt me to Himself by the power of His attraction, that I may share the life of God incarnate, which, in all its manifestations, is a life of humility; here there is unbounded scope for my legitimate ambitions; this is the heavenly road for which we need wings, the wings of love.

We will follow it with the most perfect of creatures, Mary, who was transformed by the humble Jesus.

O holy light! O warm affection! O penetrating grace from on high! I desire you, I call you to invade my soul that opens itself to your influence. I am not humble, and the world is steeped in pride.

O holy humility ! Perhaps I have not known you hitherto except by name.

O Mary, teach me the humility of Jesus ; I feel that it contains a hidden sweetness ; oh ! make me taste it, then, at last, I shall love humility—or rather, I shall love humiliation.

FIRST WEEK

THE NEED OF BEING HUMBLE



## FIRST MEDITATION

### THE DIVINE INVITATION TO HUMILITY

#### *"Sicut Parvuli"*

First point : Pride as an innate and fatal propensity.

Second point : Humility the reforming virtue.

Third point : Humility the source of celestial favours.

*Evening Preparation.*—Before commencing the rather dry series of meditations which are intended to lay a well-reasoned foundation for humility, let us first conjure up a gentler vision of this virtue.

The Divine Master shows it to us in the guise of a little open-faced child. It is no more than a glimpse, but this glimpse admirably shows us the features of a humble soul—without, no affectation; within, no pretence; only a beautiful simplicity of outlook and attitude.

This native simplicity in a child is without merit as it is without duration; but what the child possesses in happy ignorance, we should make our own by effort.

The child seems still to retain a reflection of primitive innocence. This pure reflection, this beautiful transparency, is the ideal to pursue. We have besides a far more complete and perfect ideal proposed to us: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart"; the work of humility will be wrought in us if we faithfully copy the Masterpiece.

Then make your heart ready and docile; what Jesus teaches must be true, and what He asks must be good.

Oh ! Jesus, show me to-morrow, as Thou didst to thine Apostles, that little child who is to be my model, and in its features may I see Thine !

### MEDITATION

“When they were in the house Jesus asked them : What did you treat of in the way ? But they held their peace, for in the way they had disputed among themselves, which of them should be the greatest. . . . And sitting down He called the twelve. . . . And taking a child, He set him in the midst of them. Whom, when He had embraced, He saith to them : Amen, amen, I say unto you, unless you be converted and become as little children—*sicut parvuli*—you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . . Whosoever receiveth one such child in My name receiveth Me. . . . For he that is lesser among you all, he is the greater.”

FIRST PRELUDE.—Let us imagine the road which runs from Tabor to Capharnaum. The Saviour walks in front ; the Apostles follow Him. Watch their faces animated by the discussion, listen to their pretentious words, the dubious arguments that pass between them.

All through life pride thus occupies and agitates mankind.

Let us enter the house behind Jesus. Mark the twelve as they gather round Him ; and, at a distance, the little child watching them with a naïve curiosity.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Let us ask for grace to understand this important lesson of humility, reflecting upon each word as if it fell fresh from the Divine Master’s lips for us alone.

I. *Pride as an innate and fatal propensity.*—Let us



consider the strength of this propensity and its immediate consequences. It appears in men of low estate and simple habits. It dwells in souls formed by the Saviour Himself. God has not eradicated it in the souls of the Apostles, who are destined for the highest virtue. Who then is free from it?

Let us see the consequences. It provokes bitter controversy among the Apostles. It entirely occupies and fills their minds. It makes them indifferent to the presence of their Master. They withdraw themselves from Jesus, deprive themselves of His conversation, avoid His gaze, and to what end? And does not pride produce the same effects in us: dissensions, trouble, and a weakening of piety?

II. *Humility the reforming virtue.*—Let us weigh well each of the Saviour's words: *Nisi converti fueritis*—"Unless you be converted." Then I am not to remain what I am by nature, by inclination, or even by habit. I must be different; the proud must become humble. And this is an express, necessary, and absolute condition: "*Nisi.*" Without that, I can have no place in the kingdom of heaven.

*Et efficiamini:* To remake self, whatever the difficulties and repugnances; time and patience will be necessary, for one cannot remake oneself in a day.

*Sicut parvuli.* This is the essential thing. The little child is my model; let me humble myself, make myself little, believe that I *am* little; and then I must act in accordance with this opinion. There must be no hauteur or disdain, no ambition, and no seeking for precedence, none of the preoccupations and disturbances of self-love. Like the little child, I must be simple, confident, docile, good, without pretence or

affectation; following the teaching of the Saviour, I must make myself not only little but quite little : *Sicut parvuli*.

What a tender as well as a humbling phrase ! *Non intrabitis in regnum cœlorum* : “ You shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Let us meditate upon the various meanings of this sentence. The kingdom of God is peace of soul, and I long for such peace ; it is perfection, and this is what I am striving for ; it is eternal happiness, and this is what I aspire to. It is the mission of humility to assure all these good things to me.

O Jesus, if I will consent to make myself quite small, I shall achieve this glorious destiny.

III. *Humility the source of celestial favours.*—Source of greatness. — *Statuit eum in medio eorum*. Jesus places the little child in the midst of the Apostles, in the place of honour, and He explains His action in these words : “ Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven ” ; *erit major*. If the last judgment is to bestow on us this position, we must deserve it here on earth ; then it will be ours in the eyes of God.

Oh ! how our judgments deceive us. What strange changes of rank there would be if the light of truth could pierce our darkness !

Humility — source of consolation. — *Quem cum complexus esset* : Jesus embraces the little child. What a joyous privilege to be the object of divine caresses ! Happy child, to whom greatness lovingly stoops ! If this child had not been quite little Jesus would not have embraced it.

I complain of interior desolation ; I scarcely know

what consolation is, Jesus does not put His arms around me, nor press me to His heart. Why? Why? Is He less kind now? or am I too big? Yes, perhaps so, by my pretensions. Oh! I prefer to be little and to be loved. All the satisfaction of self-love are as nothing compared with a caress from Jesus.

Humility, the principle of success.—*Qui suscepit talem in nomine meo me suscipit.* Jesus chooses from among men him who resembles this little child. He declares that He will Himself receive him. Who then will not hasten to open to Jesus his dwelling, his arms, and his heart? I shall be among these privileged ones, if I will make myself little.

God, as if in order to render His injunctions easy, makes humility a gift that pleases. The humble man seems to carry with him a sense of security and delight. We feel, we know not why, that he could not slight nor wound us. Whether he speaks or listens, there is always the same self-effacement, and the same wish to see others shine. What he asks is accorded willingly; nothing arouses in him those repulsions which are a sign of pride. Is this a radiance of soul? or a privilege of grace? or is it a fleeting apparition of Jesus? *Qui receperit talem me recipit.* . . . Oh! how I ought to wish to make myself little!

RESOLUTION.—To be a little child that Jesus may love me.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF PRIDE

A PREPARATION FOR THE TWO FOLLOWING  
MEDITATIONS

## I

We commonly give the name of "pride" to two faults which, however, are of a different nature: excessive self-esteem, and the excessive desire for the esteem of others. They have neither the same origin nor the same characteristics, neither the same mode of action nor the same effects.

The undue esteem of self is connected with the sense of personal dignity, of which it is a vicious exaggeration; and the desire for the esteem of others with our social instinct. This last is only pernicious when it induces us to seek a higher place than is our due, or when it arouses an excessive desire for it.

The common appellation of pride, given indifferently to these two faults, is authorised, in that they both have for their object the exaltation of the me; the first overrates self in its own eyes, the second wishes to be overrated by others.

In spite of this resemblance, these two tendencies should be studied separately if we wish to be in a position to analyse ourselves thoroughly, and to direct ourselves rightly. It is because essential distinctions have been ignored that most of the treatises on this subject are full of confused teaching, arbitrary qualifications, and ill-adapted methods.

## II

Are we called upon to declare against these two propensities a war so pitiless as to threaten their destruction? Humility does not seek to destroy personal dignity nor the desire of esteem, but only to regulate these sentiments; she does not crush them; on the contrary, she raises them, for in freeing them from all excess, she maintains them in all their beauty, strength, and usefulness.

In itself, indeed, self-esteem is perfectly legitimate; it has been placed by God in our nature in order to sustain our personality, to give us a consciousness of the justice of our ideas, of our powers, and of our rights.

Without it, many would fall a prey to that condition of enervation in which we do not know how to set about a perilous undertaking, nor to defend what is attacked; and it is a just self-esteem that communicates the confidence which alone secures, to their great profit, the obedience of subordinates.

Under its influence, the pious soul, admiring Christian perfection, becomes desirous of attaining this exalted state. She burns for the glory of God, and thus sets her affections upon the highest object which the ambition of a great heart can pursue.

The desire of esteem is also an honest and helpful sentiment; it is a mark of consideration towards others, a kind of submission to their judgment. Thanks to it, many people, who are not animated by supernatural motives, rise without effort to generous and devoted actions, which otherwise they would neglect or never even think of. By it many are kept to

their duty, and others, under its influence, learn a greater tenderness in their dealings with others.

Reason then demands, not that we should destroy this sentiment, but that we should subordinate and direct it, for when it is governed by lofty ideals it lends a certain attractiveness to virtue. We all like to feel that the esteem we offer is valued, and we are instinctively drawn to those who give us this pleasure.

The human element of course remains a principle of change—experience shows it only too well; but at the same time it imparts a spontaneity that renders action both easy to the doer and more agreeable to those concerned.

The desire for honour seems to belong more to this second propensity, for an honourable reputation is synonymous with public esteem. This kind of honour has its own laws and its own recompenses; we submit ourselves to the first and aspire to the second. But he who seeks for honour solely to enjoy it cannot be said to be virtuous, since the love of goodness for its own sake should be the first motive power of our efforts. If we make public esteem our rule of life we are foolish, for public opinion is a very unreliable judge.

Though honour is exterior to us, in the minds of others, it may enter into us and reign over our conscience. Then, more sensitive to honour than to homage, we shall consult principles rather than opinion, and to public esteem we shall prefer our own. Here we are in the province of the first tendency, which concerns our personal dignity.

The desire for esteem sees honour as a social good, of which it desires a part, but self-esteem as a good that is ours by right.

We cannot deny that honour has a happy influence on social life and on individual perfection. If it is accompanied by lofty principles, it lends them a firm support and receives from them a higher direction; and even without them it at least maintains a measure of stability, and imparts a certain lustre.

Honour being the result of opinion, and opinion the result of ideas which prevail in certain circles, we can imagine to what heights a group of men, or a people, might rise under the influence of the truths of the faith.

### III

It is not sin which has planted these two inclinations in our nature, they have always been there; sin only causes excess and creates for them external dangers. They come from God; so they are good in themselves, and remain good in their exercise so long as they are restrained within certain limits; and it is humility that provides for this.

When we see virtuous people setting themselves to a complete and indiscriminate repression of these tendencies, perhaps it is because, unconsciously, they are tired of the struggle, for it is very much easier to destroy a force than to maintain it constantly at its proper level.

This mutilation is generally the result of a certain narrowness of mind, and it produces unfortunate results. It leaves the soul dry, the mind uncertain, and it communicates to the exterior manner something artificial and constrained which brings virtue into discredit.



## IV

We commonly hear it said that pride arises from self-esteem, while vanity is the outcome of the desire for esteem. This is not quite just, for, on the one hand, it is vanity when we esteem ourselves for some paltry advantage, and, on the other hand, it is not vanity when the desire for esteem prompts us to render eminent services. The epithet of vanity should not then be applied to the tendency, but rather to its object. Inherited wealth, elegance of dress or establishment, add nothing to our real worth. Beauty, natural wit, even intelligence, are not merits, but gifts; yet notice this very humiliating trait in human nature: when it is a matter of fortune or of toil we are more conceited about what we have freely received than about what we have acquired by effort; a self-made man is eclipsed by a rich heir, and a student by an easy wit. All this is vanity! Vanity too the desire for an esteem that is little deserved, and that in any case is always ephemeral.

There are great ambitions as there are great characters. Great ambitions show themselves in powerful efforts and prompt the performance of splendid deeds; great characters also betray themselves in similar fashion, but with a different motive. The first are attracted by renown, the second find their incentive in their own dignity. Renown is exterior to ourselves, dignity dwells within.

These two motives may be tainted with pride without meriting the reproach of vanity; but vanity is the characteristic of both when they are debased.



## V

Let us now sum up the whole of this doctrine: The work of humility is to regulate the sentiments of self-esteem and the desire for the esteem of others.

This definition applies equally to the merely human as well as to the supernatural virtue of humility. Both teach us that there must be no excess. Where they differ is in their estimate of this excess. Simply human virtue looks to reason only for this estimate. Supernatural virtue also seeks it there, but it is more clearly defined to it by the dogmas of faith. We are in the sad state of the original fall: our absolute need of grace and of mercy is a revealed truth which changes the point of view, and imposes a more profound and penitent humility.

The example of Jesus is the means of our education, presenting to us His ideal, in which a supernatural humility is displayed.

In the following meditations we shall find this heavenly light, and motives for a more than merely human humility. Let us ask ourselves whether we have yet acquired even the simple humility demanded by reason.

The differences existing between the two sentiments generally known as pride show the necessity of particular directions for the regulation of each.

They differ as much in their moral physiognomy as in their inmost nature. He who is dominated by self-esteem has a different personality from that of him who is governed by the desire of esteem. They are two different natures, which reveal themselves to the practised observer by certain scarcely perceptible traits, as

the inspection of a bone may enable a naturalist to reconstruct the whole of a certain animal.

Let us each take care to determine beforehand to which one of the two categories we belong, if we wish to draw from the ensuing meditations the greatest possible benefit. Neither the way nor the means are the same, and the reshaping of such-and-such a nature demands a different method. General conditions and general means are indicated to all, but each must direct their application to his special end.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### EXERCISE II

#### OF SELF-ESTEEM AND CONTEMPT FOR OTHERS

First point : To prove the existence of this tendency.

Second point : Its weaknesses.

Third point : Its contradictions.

Fourth point : Its dangers.

*Evening Preparation.*—This kind of pride shows itself, according to circumstances, either in a propensity to domineer over others, or in a spirit of independence that may even go so far as rebellion. It is selfish and exacting when, as is frequently the case, it is allied with egotism. Its manners are good, but stiff. It will be just, but hard. In men of lax principles it may be a power but a vicious power, and it is more often to be met with in men than in women.

Have I not some one of the characteristics of this kind of pride? Pride is so easily disguised, and we know ourselves so little ! What we have always been,

always done, always felt, ends by appearing to be lawful, however imperfect. We have seen how prone we all are to overrate ourselves. Am I an exception to this rule? We may be proud without having every kind of pride, and even a small degree of pride is dangerous. Besides, we are subject to many illusions produced from without, though there may be little in our circumstances to call for pride.

Praise, or even common respect, makes us believe in our own superiority, and we readily take to ourselves what is due to the part God gives us to play.

To-morrow I shall probe those dark hiding-places where pride lurks, but I am too short-sighted to be able to penetrate their obscurities without the aid of Thy heavenly light, O my God. It is by Thy grace alone that I can come to know myself.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of illumination and sincere conviction.

1. *To prove the existence of this tendency.*—Let us consider the inclination that leads us to overrate ourselves (*superbia*). Consciously or unconsciously it exists and works incessantly in our minds, seeking to discover something upon which we may pride ourselves; an instinctive toil like that of the plant which endeavours to plunge its roots among the rocks, and so natural that the work goes on without our knowledge and without producing fatigue.

Let us follow the process; it attaches its attention to and fixes it upon the qualities that it attributes to itself; it contemplates them, it pleases itself with them, and nourishes itself upon them. This persistent regard

produces an indelible impression on the mind. On the other hand, it gives but a fleeting glance at what is imperfect, base, or humiliating, and the impression of this glimpse is soon effaced, not counteracting but rather strengthening our self-esteem.

Neither is there any truth in such a survey, for we have recorded only one side of the inquiry.

2. *Its weaknesses.*—If we are gifted with external advantages, though they may be nothing out of the common, we prize them above everything else. But if intelligence is our gift, then we despise the former. If we have more head than heart, we congratulate ourselves, and sincerely commiserate those whose excess of kindness makes them the prey of those cleverer than themselves. But if we possess more heart than head we speak slightly of ability.

In the matter of intelligence, we prize that with which we are best endowed. If our mind is subtle but wanting in solidity, we ask: What is there in having a heavy brain? If on the other hand it is more solid than brilliant, we cry: What are mere empty phrases? If we are successful, it is no more than we deserve; but if we have experienced a set-back, we have been unfairly treated. And so on and so on. Let us humble ourselves for such unworthy and ridiculous weaknesses.

3. *Its contradictions.*—We have indeed often been made keenly aware of our inferiority, and the discovery has caused us suffering. But at once we undertake to eliminate it, and pursuing the work relentlessly contrive to reconstruct for ourselves some sort of superiority, sometimes by dint of despising what has surpassed us. Apparent contradiction but the same

defect : I have a greater esteem for the things that are mine : pride is satisfied. To esteem what is lacking in me discourages me : pride suffers.

The contradictions of pride may be seen in the same man. Sometimes with regard to the same object. Finding himself among people better educated than himself he will say with ardent conviction : "Ah ! piety is the better part." But let him find himself with those more virtuous than himself and at once, if he thinks he excels them in it, quite a new respect for knowledge will show itself.

Let us examine our feelings and actions in such circumstances, and let us seek energetically to root out our pride and its tiresome contradictions.

4. *Its dangers.*—Nothing is easier than to render homage to God for all that we are. "It is to Thee, O my God, that I owe my talents and my success." It is an accepted formula, but it does not prevent pride from indulging in vanity and self-complacence. It dispels heretical pride, which is not really a great danger, but it does not make us sincerely turn away from ourselves.

Confident in himself, the proud man does not care to ask counsel, he disdains advice, he rebels against well-deserved failure and aggravates it, and thus falls into errors of conduct.

Clinging to his own ideas, he persists in them, without paying any attention to the advice of others, and thus he becomes stubborn.

Opposition irritates him, he gives way to vexatious words, and, his heart growing embittered, he loses charity.

The proud man betrays himself by his attitude, his

tone, his expressions; at times he even makes himself ridiculous.

One will praise him extravagantly to see how much flattery he will swallow. Another will encourage him in a mistaken course, in order to enjoy his discomfiture. Another will egg him on to self-praise, that he may make himself an object of derision: a pitiful vengeance.

Lord, may this time of probation open my eyes, and arm me with holy anger against a proclivity so tenacious, so hidden, and so dangerous!

*Reflections.*—In surveying these symptoms of pride, I feel almost reassured, for truly I cannot detect them in myself and I do not fall into such eccentricities. But who indeed carries the fault to such excess, and on the other hand, who will dare to think himself wholly free from it?

What shocks us in theory, and in others, may easily pass unnoticed in ourselves.

In this meditation I am making an analysis, drawing a picture, stigmatising a vice; I have conceived a horror of it, and fear it in itself; this is a great point.

Now my ideas are formed, my conscience is warned. I possess the means of discernment, and the will to fight.

O my God, during these meditations, I beseech Thee to show me myself. It is sad that I have lived so long in darkness, but now, out of the darkness objects begin little by little to emerge, and I shall watch myself carefully. Thy light, O Holy Spirit, will be the torch that my instant prayer will apply to the dark places of my life; Thou wilt reveal me to myself, a being whom I did not know. I do not feel proud; but not to be so

I must be entirely humble. That sounds like a naïveté; it is a piercing ray of light. Who, in fact, is perfectly humble? Am I humble to such a degree?

RESOLUTION.—An innate propensity urging me to overrate myself, it is a matter of simple wisdom to incline rather to believe myself lower than I think.

## THIRD MEDITATION

### EXERCISE III

#### ON THE EXCESSIVE DESIRE OF ESTEEM

First point : The nature and power of this tendency.

Second point : Disorders to which it may lead.

Third point : The folly it may give rise to.

*Evening Preparation.*—To-morrow I am to face this disposition, which may so easily dominate me. I am to find out its dangers and discover the miserable side of it. If I would not be a victim to this excessive desire of esteem, here are some of the signs by which I may detect it : uneasiness, or at least preoccupation, caused by the fear of blame. According to circumstances, either foolish joy or uncontrolled sorrow; according to temperament, discouragement, irritation, envy, jealousy, detraction, etc. What smallness it engenders, what meannesses it sanctions, what falseness it inspires! I ought to fear it because it demoralises; I ought to watch it because it is tenacious, and because great virtue alone can escape it.



## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—As in the preceding meditation, to ask the grace of illumination and great sincerity of conviction.

1. *The nature and power of this tendency.*—The desire for the esteem of others must not be confounded with the sentiment of self-esteem.

We meet with it, in fact, in persons who recognise their own worthlessness, and some even deliberately allow others to attribute qualities to them that they do not possess. On the other hand, some men, satisfied with themselves, disdain the opinion of others.

The desire of praise is, then, a special form of pride. "The sweetness of fame is so great," said Pascal, "that we love whatever bestows it, even death itself. We would joyfully lose our lives if only we might be spoken of. We are so presumptuous that we wish for a world-wide reputation, and so vain that the esteem of the five or six people who surround us pleases and gratifies us."

This weakness appears in the small child, and is, according to Plato, "the last garment that we lay aside."

2. *Disorders to which it may lead.*—A reasonable and peaceful liking for the esteem of men is not a vice: it is sometimes a personal help, and a stimulus to useful actions; this is why we may bestow praise as an encouragement.

In reality, everything good deserves to be esteemed; disorder consists in loving esteem more than goodness, in desiring it beyond what we deserve, and in seeking it with eagerness.



What does that man pursue who is dominated by the love of praise? Is it well-doing? No, but the notoriety it brings him. Thus he aims not at doing his duty, but at its accidental reward.

The vain man may be useful and generous, but only in order to appear so. Let him be misunderstood, and he loses all interest, for approbation was his support. Then depression and irritation follow, as the different crises of the same disease. Depression plunges him into the inaction of discouragement, irritation provokes him to break all obstacles, and is not very scrupulous in its counsels as to the choice of means.

On the other hand, success will produce a disorder quite as serious. The vain man, knowing himself esteemed, straightens and expands himself. He breathes more deeply in order the better to draw in the eulogies bestowed on him. Illusion envelops him as in a cloud, and the exact appreciation of things escapes him. He may easily become rash, and will "collapse" in his folly.

Is he wicked? No, but yet he appears hard. Is he unjust? No, yet he tramples on the rights of others: he has not noticed them. Is he false? No, and yet he changes his opinions, his attitude, his manner of speaking, according to the company he is in; he is by turns arrogant or flattering, as it suits him; he will even go so far as to simulate humility. He has only one aim in view: to occupy a higher place in the esteem of others. And all this is done in serene unconsciousness.

3. *The folly of this tendency.*—If in practice we are preserved from such excess by our contact with reality, let us cast a look into the depths of our interior, and see what is passing there.

Endless idle dreams, in which in imagination we do brilliant things with astonishing success; situations which reveal in us qualities superior to any we have exhibited under normal conditions. Already we hear murmurs of applause; we see faces lighted up with enthusiasm; we enjoy our own and others' surprise. These are dreams, and we know them for such, but they foster our weakness.

It is a pleasure, and in default of the reality we enjoy it, though in certain lucid waking moments we may cry : What a fool I am !

This vain love of praise is indeed folly, though often a sweet folly that we smile at indulgently when it shows itself; but at times it is a terrible folly, whose mistakes may destroy us !

Ah ! what need we have of a clear knowledge of ourselves ! What need of humility !

Let us examine the motives that have prompted us in the important decisions of our lives; those which animate us to-day in our ordinary actions.

Above all, let us consider what is the true source of our joys and our griefs. Only too often we shall find that it is praise or blame.

Let us scrutinise our conduct. Do we not favour those who flatter us ? And if we imagine that a certain person does not care for us, do we not readily show ourselves hostile and unjust towards him ? We must conceive a great desire for humility, being assured that we are lacking in the virtue, and therefore in moral equilibrium.

RESOLUTION.—To say to myself again and again to-day : " Suppose those about me knew how greedy I am for esteem ! "

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The analysis of the propensities which tend to self-aggrandisement may be appropriately followed by a consideration of the part humility must play in their regard; we shall prove that without humility, Christian virtue can neither be established, nor can it endure, and that the punishment of pride is brought about by pride itself.

Self-esteem prompts us to depend upon our own ideas, our own resources, and our own wills. Now, what happens when this self-confidence is excessive? We are certain to make mistakes and to be deceived. But this is the least inconvenience. What is more serious is that the sense of our need of God is destroyed; and this is worse than a mere fault, it is a grave danger, for such an attitude implies the negation of grace.

Under the influence of this disposition the proud man does not dream of consulting God, nor of imploring His help, however great the need. Blinded by his own intelligence, he sees neither the fact nor, above all, the hatefulness of this strange neglect.

This error, born of defective sentiment, is responsible for many disasters.

This analysis may be summed up thus: God, by His grace, is the principle of virtue. The proud think and act as though they themselves were this principle.

The excessive desire of esteem is equally opposed to virtue, though in a different way; it, too, however, attacks the rights of God.

God is not merely the principle of our virtuous actions. He should also be the end, and our own

interests, even when legitimate, should be a secondary motive.

But what place has such a point of view in a soul where a craving for the esteem of others reigns supreme?

If we set our heart on succeeding, it is because we desire the honour that attends success; and if we suffer so much when we fail, it is because it lowers us.

What efforts, what sacrifices, have been made in order to obtain a more brilliant position, an honourable distinction, or even simple praise; and in all the consequent tumult of personal hopes and fears—not one thought of God! Actions inspired by such motives, good and beneficent though they may be in themselves, have in them nothing supernatural, nor even virtuous in the true sense of the word. What shall we say of a life actuated almost entirely by such motives?

This second analysis may also be summed up in a few words: God should be the final end of all our actions; the proud man forgets and sets Him aside, preoccupied solely with himself. He also injures God in another way, by preferring to His esteem the vain esteem of creatures.

To punish the proud man God has only to leave him to himself; the consequences clearly illustrate some of the ideas expressed in our earlier pages.

Fallen man, left to himself, tends towards evil; and if he is not supported by the help of God, sooner or later he falls into sin, speedily sinking lower and lower, in accordance with the law, perfectly applicable in the moral world, by which falling objects decline ever faster and faster. We will develop this truth later.

Pride such as this, calling down a like chastisement, is rare among Christians who keep in touch with God, and it is still more rare among pious people. We should fear, however, a lesser degree of pride, that still may call down just punishment: persistent dryness in devotion, sadness, and faults, into which, alas! God may allow us to fall.

This kind of punishment is the special visitation of immoderate self-esteem; the excessive desire of esteem more often finds its chastisement in the joy that is perpetually sought but never found. It begins with preoccupation and ends in disappointment.

This craving always exceeds the possibilities of attainment, and its avidity is ever on the increase.

God, on His side, finding Himself forgotten, turns away, and by the withdrawal of His grace inflicts the greatest punishment of all. Not for His own satisfaction does He sow with bitterness our human joys, making us miserable in our fruitless quests; but in the fond hope that one day hunger will drive the prodigal back to his father's house.

The nature of humility now stands revealed with perfect clearness: it is truth and order, for order and justice are equivalent terms.

The truth is that God and not ourselves is the principle of all good; and order means that God must be the end of all our actions.

If God is the principle of all good, my duty consists in living in entire dependence upon Him; if He is the bounden end of all my actions, my duty is to consecrate them all to His greater glory.

As principle, God is law and demands obedience;

as end, He is to be our sovereign motive and He demands purity of intention.

What can He do with a being that defies the law and ignores his end?

We will continue to develop these ideas more fully, that we may understand them better.

## FOURTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE IV

#### HUMILITY THE FOUNDATION OF ALL VIRTUE

First point : The foundation of the virtues.

Second point : Purity of intention.

Third point : Confidence in God.

*Evening Preparation.*—To-morrow I shall consider this truth more closely, with the idea rather of self-instruction than of self-examination. To instruct ourselves is the first step towards the good that we are in pursuit of. I must face this truth fairly : that humility is the foundation of every other virtue. If this be true, in what sense are we to understand it? What is its range? and by what practical dispositions are we to exhibit it?

Up to now I have accepted the statement without question, but also without inquiry into its reasonableness.

My vague ideas on the subject and my consequent want of conviction may be in part responsible for my imperfect humility.

O my God, give me Thy light and Thy holy fear. But above all grant me the will to make myself humble.

## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—Ask for grace to realise the close connection between humility and the other Christian virtues.

1. *The foundation of virtue.*—Virtue is the sum of good dispositions and acquired powers which, maintaining us in the practice of well-doing, constitutes our moral greatness. This is why it has been compared to an edifice.

Every edifice that is to endure must rest on solid foundations. Those of virtue, as we have seen above, are no other than God as the principle and end of our spiritual life. Now the virtue that recognises Him as such and allows Him to play this part in our lives is humility; it is humility that acknowledges Him as the first principle of our virtuous actions and as the final end of our intentions.

Self-esteem, on the contrary, when undisciplined, prompts the proud man to rely too much on himself, and to attribute to himself the good that he does. On the other hand, an immoderate desire for esteem will lead him, in everything, to consider what will bring him the most respect and praise. In a final analysis, the foundation of moral actions is in the motive that inspires them; their motive is their soul. Now, we may reflect that, though our human actions, generally speaking, may have very varied motives, it is not so with our virtuous actions. These are prompted either by the desire to please God, or by the desire to attract to ourselves the esteem of men.

The love of pleasure, for instance, never produces even an appearance of virtue.



The proud man places all his confidence in himself, and even in virtue seeks his own excellence.

The conflict, O my God, is, then, between Thee and my pride. Is my virtue to rest upon Thee Who art my strength, or upon myself who am naught but weakness? Shall my life tend to Thy glory, or to the satisfaction of my own vainglory? Art Thou to be my God, or is self to be my idol?

A great truth is brought out in these words: pride is the rival of God, pride is the Me substituting itself for Him. This state of things presents itself in two aspects, and may be summed up in these two phrases: I rely on myself, I act for myself.

I rely on myself, on my own *savoir-faire*, on my resolution, and on my own strength. Foolish words, for without God I can do nothing.

I act for myself: wrong and unjust words, for God should be the final end of everything He has created.

The opposite of these hateful pretensions may also be summed up in two short sentences: I rely on God, I act for God. This is confidence in God, and purity of intention.

2. *Confidence in God*.—I rely on God. It is the property of humility to show us our dependence in everything. Without God we can do nothing; and in every supernatural action His grace is an absolute necessity to us.

We shall meditate later on these truths; let us be content for the moment to admit them and to draw from them this inevitable conclusion: that to rely on self is simply foolish. Now this folly is the outcome of pride.

Grace being indispensable to us, God, in His



wisdom, requires that when we present ourselves to receive it, we should do so with dispositions suitable to our state, and He has, therefore, made humility the condition of His gifts.

Humility, regarded from this point of view, is self-distrust. Now this holy distrust instinctively turns with confidence to God, saying, "I know myself, and that I can do nothing; but I also know God, and that with Him I can do all things. The more I feel my littleness, my weakness, and my inclination to evil, the more I find growing within me the need of confidence in God."

3. *Purity of intention*.—"I act for God"—this is the formula, and in this short sentence are expressed order, wisdom, and goodness, for to act for God is to gravitate towards the Infinite Being by Whom everything exists; to play my part in the universal concert that glorifies Him; to take my rightful place in the beneficent plan that He has formed. Has not God rights, since He is the Supreme Being and eminently worthy of love? and should I not be indeed foolish if I did not make Him the end of all my actions?

Now pride draws me away from Him, even when it is only pride in practice.

Without making an absolute idol of self, we may yet in will and deed be concerned chiefly with self. Without formally excluding God we may ignore Him in our intentions, and in this way put ourselves outside His eternal scheme, lose our true orientation, and become as it were the vagrants of creation.

It is humility that ensures purity of intention. It destroys our self-obsession, and keeps us in our place. The truly humble soul willingly acknowledges the

rights of God and respects them. She makes them her rule of life, and if she encroaches upon them she is sorry, and tries to make amends. This purity of intention is a necessity to her, and the light of it shines in all her actions.

Happy is the soul that is entirely humble, and who has abandoned herself to the designs of the Almighty Father. She wills all that He wills, and loves all that He loves. She endures exterior trials and interior desolations with the same equability, for no other frame of mind would be possible to her.

How far removed is the proud soul from such a disposition, and how much she is to be pitied ! for it is written : " Every plant that my Father has not planted shall be rooted up."

Purity of intention and confidence in God are both of them the daughters of humility. Purity of intention directs, confidence animates, and together they pave the way that leads to perfection. God, Who in this world is the object of their pursuit, will in Heaven be their everlasting possession.

RESOLUTION.—Not to allow the esteem of men to become a necessity to me, but to elevate myself to a desire for God's ; this should be sufficient for me, and by it I must be governed.

## FIFTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE V

THE GROWTH OF VIRTUE HINDERED BY  
UNCONSCIOUS PRIDE

First point : The fact and its causes.

Second point : Indicative signs.

*Evening Preparation.*—In to-morrow's meditation I shall give myself up to a retrospective examination; I shall go over again the period of my training; I shall examine the motives that have inclined me to well-doing; I shall seek to discover what have been the exterior influences that have kept me in the right path; I will put on one side all that was pure, disinterested, and actuated by the love of God, and on the other all that was more or less consciously tainted with self-complacency and the desire of esteem.

O my God, enable me to get far enough away from myself that I may see clearly. Recall to my memory all these little details which go to make up the past. I beseech Thee, if my spiritual life has been infected with excess of pride, make me to know, to feel, and to abhor it.

## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To pray that God will throw upon my past life His searching light, to enable me to discover whether my humility is solid and sincere.

1. *The fact considered in this meditation and its causes.*—There are virtues which are formed under the more or less actual influence of unconscious pride. There is even a great deal of such virtue. Mine may

be of the same kind. Is it possible that pride may have had a share in establishing me in pious habits, and I have been unaware of it? We often speak of hidden pride, pride in disguise—but I did not suppose that I could ever fall a victim to it. Yet my slackness and my faults must be in great measure due to the fact that my virtues are built upon the unstable foundations of pride.

O my soul, be attentive and pray!

Have we ever noted the consequences of these two psychological facts: the essential imitateness of man, and his sensitiveness and adaptability to environment? Let us apply the test to the period of our own development.

By what persons were we surrounded? what were the prevailing ideas among them? etc. It is enough to say that the influences of our lives were good and tended to piety. Nothing was more highly honoured than virtue; heroical goodness was admired; those who showed any approach to sanctity were held in veneration; books and conversation all concurred to strengthen good impressions. We valued such things and envied those who were better than ourselves.

Were such sentiments absolutely pure and unalloyed that in truth incited us to well-doing? Or did the desire to have a share in the general esteem play some part in our enthusiasm for goodness? Did our contentment in the service of God borrow nothing from our self-contentment, and from our consciousness of the place we occupied in the minds of others? Ah! who shall disclose these secrets that are known to God alone?

We may easily conceive the possibility that our

humility itself may have been at least partially inspired by pride!

In such a *milieu* as that of which we have spoken, humility is deemed the pre-eminent virtue. It is well-nigh impossible not to make an exterior show of it, to adopt its expressions, and even to feel something of the sentiment. To believe ourselves humble, and sufficiently humble, is a need. Doubtless this humility may be sincere, for such influences foster its growth in a wonderful way; but it may also be a very superficial humility. A naturally proud soul will be thrown off the scent, and in her pursuit for humility may easily mistake the shadow for the substance.

Once more, who shall fathom these mysteries that are known only to God?

2. *Indications*.—The Divine Master said: "The tree is known by its fruit." Let us apply this test to our lives.

As we grew up and our environment changed, what became of our beautiful enthusiasms? Was not our zeal for perfection, and especially for humility, soon extinguished?—and that without our putting up any great show of resistance, or feeling any sense of shock.

Yet those new surroundings still encouraged the growth of virtue, though perhaps not in so pronounced a fashion. Different ideas held sway, and faithful to our pliant nature and for the satisfaction of our self-love we adapted ourselves to them.

Our attitude when faced with contradictions, failure, injustice, and scorn, is also another noteworthy sign. If we are troubled, sad, and preoccupied, we betray our imperfect virtue, resting more or less on a basis of pride.

When there is real discouragement, anger, animosity, jealousy, rebellion : then we may be sure that pride is deep-rooted and dominant within us.

Our humility was then only on the surface, its sentiments only those we had learnt ! If it had been real and thorough it would have imparted to us calm and resignation, perhaps even that lofty peace and joy that the great souls of the Apostles experienced even when they were under the scourge. *ibant gaudentes*.

I thank Thee, O my God, for this clear light that penetrates the depths of my life. I confess that it wounds me with its brightness ; I suffer, while I question whether I do not stand in need of being wholly remade. I behold my virtue as the result merely of my surroundings, and I ask myself what I should have been had my environment, my position, my occupations, and my associates, been entirely different ? At the mere thought of such moral isolation I long to hide myself on Thy breast, O Thou Who art my only refuge ! O God, create in me a new and humble soul ! *Multi humilitatis umbram pauci veritatem sequuntur :* " Many pursue the shadow of humility, few the reality," said S. Jerome.

RESOLUTION.—To ask myself if I should behave in the same manner, with the same affability, the same zeal, if there were none but God to notice it and to be pleased with me.

## SIXTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE VI

## HUMILITY THE GUARDIAN OF THE VIRTUES

First point : Humility the salt that preserves.

Second point : Humility the light that disperses illusion.

*Evening Preparation.*—If our virtue is built even in part upon an unconscious pride, the edifice is founded on the sand, there is constant danger of destruction. If it is established on God, we may be reassured as to the past, but we must not be without fear for the future, for pride is able to destroy even the most solidly built edifice.

“He who without humility gathers to himself virtues,” says S. Jerome, “is like the man who faces the wind with a load of fine dust”—*Qui sine humilitate virtutes congregat, quasi in ventum pulverem portat*. “Oh! what violent winds blow around us, and in what danger are our fleeting resolutions!”

S. Anthony, frightened by a vision that showed him the temptations of the world, cried : “Lord! how shall we be preserved from them?” “By humility,” was the response.

Humility, the basis of the virtues, is also, and for the same reason, their guardian; she makes God the principle and the end of our actions. Pride unjustly attributes them to self, and destroys the edifice. The whole of tradition teaches us this truth, and we, in our turn, repeat it; but though it may be an accepted



maxim, are we really convinced of its truth? We have cause to fear if we discover that, though we may not be positively proud, neither are we humble.

The humble soul is conscious at all times of the need of God, of His indulgence as well as of His help.

Such a one feels that in view of his misery and weakness, he walks like a wounded man to whom all movement is painful.

By such humility virtue is well guarded. O my God, may it become mine !

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE. — Ask for grace to throw myself into humility as into a citadel that will protect me.

1. *Humility the salt that preserves.*—The greater the virtue, the greater the danger of pride, for all well-doing is matter for vain self-complacence and the applause of men.

Vain self-complacence commences the work of disintegration. It insinuates itself so quietly, and its promptings are such pleasant hearing ; it is so accommodating, and knows so well how to disguise itself.

Like a poison mixed with wholesome substances, it mingles itself with our satisfaction in working for the glory of God and the salvation of souls ; it is found in sensible devotion, and follows us in the most sublime elevations of the soul.

Unconsciously to ourselves, it grows and ravages our souls, and its action is so slow that it does not arouse our vigilance. Thus the poison infects even our highest virtues.

Vain self-complacence begins the work of destruction, and the love of praise completes it. This murmur



of approbation from without echoes so agreeably within! Of course, we assure ourselves that we shall not be misled by it; we regret that it should be offered to us; we give to God all the glory — and yet our pleasure in it is deep and real.

Under this double influence the evil grows; it is not one transient action that is vitiated by it, but a whole series of actions; soon, perhaps, it may affect the whole life.

Virtue is corrupted, and, though for some time it will be upheld by sheer force of habit and the demands of pride itself, it will not be able to sustain this fictitious life for long.

Some strong temptation, or unexpected circumstance, a mere nothing, and it will crumble into dust.

How may we prevent such a misfortune? By being humble. "She will be with virtue, or virtue will not be," said S. Augustine of humility: *Virtus non est nisi conjunctam habeat humilitatem*. Humility must be sprinkled upon our virtues as salt is sprinkled upon a substance that we wish to preserve; it will prevent all destructive fermentation, it will detach us from a too personal point of view, and it will enable us to find our satisfaction in God alone.

But in order to be effective this virtue must be real; it must operate with the ease, spontaneity, and willingness of a habit. Otherwise we shall often be taken by surprise. Humility must become as natural to us as pride was.

Let us, then, address our prayers to the Master and to the Queen of the humble.

2. *Humility the light that disperses illusion.*—It is a common saying, and profoundly true, that pride is

blind; and the masters of the spiritual life have so well understood the nature of humility that they have always looked upon this virtue as the most reliable test in the discernment of spirits. Is the virtue of such and such a person real or assumed? Does this extraordinary contemplation come from God? Is that vision real or imaginary? The answer will depend chiefly upon the humility of the favoured individual.

This test should be applied equally to the most ordinary virtue.

We must fear the delusions of pride that we see in others, and fear also our own self-contentment, if we do not also feel that we are very small—for very small we are, and very weak and miserable.

God does not judge as men judge. Those who, perhaps, look upon us as saints do not know our ingratitude and the faults which still dog our footsteps. To put and to keep us in our right place, our humility needs to be real and sincere, penetrating our minds and exhibiting to us our nothingness, our helplessness, and our faults. In a word, our humility must be true.

It is indeed very easy to wander off the track, to go astray, and to fall into tepidity; we choose our duties and plan our lives to suit ourselves and our own tastes; what we like seems good to us; we expose ourselves to dangers we are not called upon to face; we excuse our faults and continue to commit them; we do not feel the need of prayer; we live for self without regretting it; and thus tepidity gains upon us and demoralises us.

If humility had been really active, all these failings would have been detected and arrested, for humility gives an instinct for what is good and true.

If we only had a deep sense of self-mistrust, we

should clearly perceive the need for resolute self-conquest, if we are not to offer resistance to grace.

3. Nothing warps the conscience so much as the influence of indulged pride; nothing keeps it so clear and decided as the sentiment of humility.

The humble soul, distrustful of self, will follow the safe way, asking advice willingly, avoiding danger, praying unceasingly, and availing herself of every aid. She may attain to great virtue, yet she will scarcely be aware of it. She may be confirmed in well-doing, yet she will feel in herself how weak she is. Oh! what a perfect guardian of virtue is humility!

Without it, how many and what serious falls we may experience! The roots of the tree decay, the foundations of the edifice crumble away. The tempest of passion arises, or the violent strain of difficult circumstances; the tree is uprooted from the soil of the Church, and the beautiful structure falls into ruin. And the tree is not replanted, nor the ruins rebuilt; while, close at hand, sinners who have been wallowing in the mire find, in spite of their faults, and even through their faults, a saving humility. *Præsumentes de se et de bona sua virtute gloriantes, humilias*—"He who glories in his strength and prides himself on his virtue shall be humiliated by Thee, O Lord."

RESOLUTION.—To live constantly in fear of myself, and to carry this fear about with me like a sensitive wound.

## SEVENTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE VII

## THE PUNISHMENT OF PRIDE

First point : Personal ineffectiveness.

Second point : The abandonment and aversion of God.

Third point : Forfeiture and degradation.

*Evening Preparation.*—Pride tends to deprive God of His glory, and of His rightful place. It puts in His place, unintentionally, perhaps, but practically, what is already sufficiently detestable. How is it that God suffers it? What would be the feelings of a human master towards a servant who did what he liked and insisted that he was within his rights? How would he treat him? He would not only punish him, but he would punish him in such a way as to bring home to him the meanness and despicableness of his pretensions.

All law aims at maintaining order; and humility is the law of our present condition.

Its violation produces disorder within us, around us, and in our intercourse with God; and from thence proceed error, danger, failure, perhaps the ruin of virtue, and even final impenitence.

Punishment seldom falls swiftly on the culprit, it comes slowly but surely. Years may pass during which he may have no forebodings, and he may become so confirmed in his mistaken path as to pursue it almost unconsciously.

I will place before myself to-morrow this real cause for fear. May it incite me to make strong resolutions.

It must be remembered that it is not enough that we do not seem to be proud, we must feel humble—that is, worthless and helpless in ourselves.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask God to convince me that the question of humility and pride is a question of life or death.

1. *Personal ineffectiveness.*—Pride possesses the fatal property of rendering ineffective in us everything that it touches. The most beautiful action, inspired by pride, is worthless in the sight of God. It is like an unfruitful flower, and everything good that is tainted by the breath of pride withers in the same way. Thus the most active life that is inspired by pride is like the vessel of the Danaids that nothing could replenish because it was full of holes.

Our Lord, speaking of the Pharisees who fasted and prayed in order to attract attention, cried, "Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward."

Why, indeed, should God reward what is not done for Him? He will not, and besides, He cannot, for every action that is not prompted by a supernatural intention, at least virtually, is deprived of His co-operation. There is no life in it, and grace being absent, no glory can shine upon it. Not being inspired by the Holy Spirit, it cannot receive the blessing of Heaven.\*

We may imagine the chagrin of the proud man

\* To be meritorious, an action must fulfil these three conditions: 1. It must be good in itself. 2. The doer must be in a state of grace. 3. There must be a supernatural intention.

when, after death, he finds himself with his hands empty, and hears the sentence: "I know you not." He is amazed. Has he not prophesied? Has he not suffered a thousand hardships? Has he not given himself up to pious exercises, even to the very hour of his death?

Yes, he has done all this, and in certain works he has been very successful. But what has been the principal motive of all his activity? Applause, respect. He has, alas! obtained them, and that is all. His reward is worthy of his vanity: *Receperunt mercedem vani vanum*—"Their virtue was vain, and vain was their reward" (S. Augustine).

Happy is he if heaven is still open to him. He owes it to the only Mercy, and that Mercy has perhaps been touched by some little good deed, or pious practice, that he has made small account of; perhaps by some prayer of another and very humble soul.

But what treasures of grace has he lost for ever!

2. *The abandonment and aversion of God.*—In order to chastise the proud man, God has no need to arm Himself with a sword; it is sufficient to leave him to himself. Nothing could be more just, since he is presumptuous; nothing could be more fatal, for he is weak.

Blinded by his illusions, swayed by his impulses, he rushes into the abyss. His sense of danger is dormant, his eyes are blinded, and he does not feel the need of asking for light and help.

Now, between the all-powerful God and man who is essentially weak, there is a tacit contract. "Be humble and pray; keep in thy place," says God, "and I will be in Mine, and will sustain thee."

The bond of this covenant broken, we may be left to ourselves; and this is not a mere possibility.

But if the abandonment of God is terrible, how much more so is His aversion! It is almost hatred; *Tres species odivi . . . pauperem superbum*—"Three things provoke my hatred . . . the poor man who is proud." *Abominatio Domini omnis arrogans*—"The Lord holds the arrogant man in abomination."

This hatred pursues the proud man, and nothing can shield him from its avenging fury. *Superbia cordis tui exaltavit te: et si exaltatus fueris ut aquila, et si inter sidera posueris nidum tuum, inde detraham te, dicit Dominus.* "The pride of thy heart hath lifted thee up; but though thou be exalted as an eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars: thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord."

Let us meditate upon these terrible words, the unexpected revelation of the hatred felt towards this vice by a Heart distinguished for its mercy!

High position, even in the Church; eminent services rendered, even to religion; admirable virtues, no doubt admired too much; all these things may become matter for pride without being a defence of it in the eyes of God. "Thence will I bring thee down"—*inde detraham te*; and He has already thus treated great potentates—*Deposuit potentes de sede.*

3. *Forfeiture and degradation.*—Let us see how the aversion of God is displayed, and to what His abandonment leads.

S. Paul, speaking of the philosophers sunk in their pride, says: *Tradidi et illos in desideria cordis eorum in immunditiam*—"Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their hearts, unto uncleanness, to dis-



honour their own bodies among themselves." See them fallen, degraded, and reckoned among the brutes—*Animalis homo*.

Warned by this spectacle, let us bear in mind that pride is the cause of such degradation, and has the power to produce it. *Initium omnis peccati superbia*. It is the source of all the vices, as we know by revelation as well as by experience, but we scarcely care to translate the words in which its terrible effects are described in the Scriptures: *Sicut eructant præcordia jætantiam . . . sic et cor superborum*.

After this, can we be surprised to hear that pride is one of the most manifest signs of reprobation?

The proud man, once plunged into evil-doing, finds in it his tomb. If he is to be saved, he must recognise his guilt; he must ask for grace, he must humble himself; and of all this he is incapable.

*Reflection*.—Among the punishments we have just considered, there is not one that we may not be liable to bring upon ourselves sooner or later. Truly we have to fear the insidious growth of pride, and the anger of God when this vice deprives Him of the glory that is His due. We should tremble in considering the different natures of good and evil. There must be nothing lacking to our goodness—any hiatus gives an opening to evil. An action that may be ever so good, if it is prompted by self-love is vitiated even at its birth. Again, though rightly begun, it may be suddenly changed and spoilt by the creeping in of a motive of pride.

Lastly, perfectly accomplished, it may leave in us a destructive germ of self-complacency.

From this dreary picture let us turn our eyes to a



more consoling one, that which depicts the reign of humility.

Instead of rendering our greatest actions futile, it gives merit even to the smallest.

Instead of arousing the aversion of God, it calls forth His tenderness.

Instead of debasing us, it elevates. *De stercore erigens pauperem. Et exaltavit humiles.*

Lastly, instead of the presages of damnation, there are assurances of salvation. *Humiles salvabit Dominus.* And it cannot be otherwise. The humble man prays, and God listens. *Respicit in orationem humilium.* He can do all in Him Who strengthens him; he lives, yet not he, but God lives in him. Whenever he can, he retires into shadow and silence, and in the shadow God reveals Himself, and in the silence He speaks to him. He is forgetful of the good that he does, he is gentle to everyone, and filial towards God. Who will not feel the need of the desire to become humble?

RESOLUTION. — I will make myself humble, cost what it will.



SECOND WEEK

REASONS FOR BEING HUMBLE



## PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND WEEK

THE need of humility is sufficiently demonstrated to us when we see how persistently pride tempts us even when it is held in check. It is a life-long enemy.

The foundations of virtue are undermined by this vice, and become unstable; the principles of the spiritual life are threatened; our good deeds are deprived of their merit, and punishment and destruction follow.

We must, then, make ourselves humble. This need, well established though it is, does not, however, give us the clue to the *raison d'être* of humility, though it assures us that such a *raison d'être* exists.

All disorder, indeed, points to some evil, since God has put goodness, like health, in equilibrium.

Then humility should result from the very nature of things, and to be humble is merely to be true. It is this that will be shown in the following meditations.

I. The first four meditations set forth the condition of man considered as a created being, as a fallen being, and as a being transformed by grace.

The result of these considerations should be a humility that all alike need, the most perfect as well as the most faulty—humility before God.

It would seem that such a humility should be easy, since it is only in accordance with right feeling; it is, however, a very puissant humility, for it has made saints. Why has it not made many saints? Is human

weakness the reason? In great part, for we see the best and pursue the worst. But it is also due to a want of conviction.

Traditional truths do not arrest the attention, they are too familiar; and even when seriously examined, they do not strike us with any force, for abstract truth makes little impression on the generality of people.

The preceding meditations, on the contrary, should have impressed us, for they envisage our tendencies as moral facts—facts well nigh as tangible as material facts—and facts have the power to strike and convince us.

Though this cannot be said of the new truths which we are about to consider, we should take care not to fall into the mistake of regarding as uncertain what is less tangible, and looking upon revelations that surprise us as doubtful.

We are apt to resemble those ignorant people who shrug their shoulders when a scientific man shows them all that is contained, for instance, in a drop of water. They do not know that beneath the outward shows of things an unknown world lies hidden.

2. To these four abstract, and in some sort impersonal, meditations succeeds a consideration of our faults. This entirely concerns ourselves and no one else. It is no longer metaphysical truth but our own work that is spread out before our eyes, the work of our whole life, including all our actions, all our thoughts, and all our guilty omissions; a vast field, some portions of which, belonging to the distant past, are shrouded in obscurity and shadowed by illusions, but which, under the light of a serious examination, will become clearly distinguishable.

This meditation must become the basis of our humility, our personal humility, a humility which abases us not only before God, but before men; a humility which extinguishes an exaggerated sense of self-esteem, and forbids us to seek an esteem from others which we know we do not deserve.

3. To esteem an object is to recognise its worth, and its worth can only be measured by some comparison. In this case it is the comparison with others. With whom shall I compare myself? With the low and miserable? No, for they do not merit esteem. Then I must compare myself with the great and good, and I see that God and the Saints are the only true measure of the greatness and goodness that deserve esteem. This meditation is designed to complete the effect of abstract reasoning by force of a sensible impression.

4. Because we find in certain motives for humility a reason to abase ourselves only before God, are we to conclude that such motives can have no influence on our intercourse with men, because they do not prompt us to a practical humility?

Not at all. Humility, though it has indeed two objects, God and our neighbour, is in essence one and the same, an inclination to self-abasement.

These meditations, developing in the first place our humility towards God, will enable us to overcome our disposition to overrate ourselves, and will lead us to a wise measure of humility towards our neighbour.

As all intellectual culture increases our power to assimilate knowledge, and all true affection disposes us the better to love God, so it is with the acquisition of humility, whatever may be its object.

Endeavour to absorb these truths, which, however,

will cause you to lower your head and will make you feel that you dare not again rashly suppose yourself superior to anyone.

## FIRST MEDITATION

### EXERCISE VIII

#### THE NOTHINGNESS OF THE CREATURE

First point : The nothingness of being : I am nothing.

Second point : The nothingness of action : I can do nothing.

*Evening, Preparation.*—If we derived our being from some matter that exists outside God, or if, being created by Him, we could appropriate as our own even the smallest fraction of our substance, we should have a value—and a value, though minute, that would be appreciable.

But this is not the case; for though we come from God, we do not pass out of His fruitful bosom except by His creative act and almighty will. We are not beings, properly speaking, but something as unsubstantial and as fugitive as notes of music coming forth from an instrument under the fingers of a musician. God is neither enriched by the fact that He becomes a Creator, nor diminished by the fact that we exist.

This is a definite truth, demonstrated by reason, and admitted by the most rigorous philosophy.

And yet, in spite of all this, I am, I have, a kind of being; this being has an extension and a form; it acts, it displaces matter, and it transforms it; it wills or it does not will; it is free; it is conscious, by its intelligence, of the universe; and by its genius it can produce



marvels. Is, then, all this nothing? A being and its actions must be something.

Let us clearly understand at once that this something, in the sight of God, is so vain and so ephemeral that the Scriptures call it "a quasi nothing": *tanquam nihilum ante te*—in short, a being that does not count!

Thus are explained the words of S. Paul: *Quis te discernit? Quid habes quod non accepisti?* "What hast thou more than others? What hast thou that thou hast not received?"

This profound point of view is disconcerting and startling enough to confuse us, but it is an inevitable conclusion that imposes itself upon the whole soul and determines the whole will; for humility is not only a conviction, it is an active virtue. It is not enough to philosophise on all these questions; the chief thing is to practise them.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to conceive such a lively sense of my own nothingness that it may penetrate and direct me.

I. *The nothingness of being: I am nothing.*—Our Lord said to S. Catherine of Siena: "Dost thou know, My daughter, Who I am and who thou art? Thou art happy if thou knowest it; I am He Who is; thou art she who art not."

God is Being in the fullest meaning of the word, it is the name He gives to Himself: *Ego sum, qui sum*. "I am nothingness in all its emptiness, and this is my name": *Substantia mea tanquam nihilum*—"My substance is a kind of nothing."

Before my creation I did not exist, even in the most

elemental sense. A thousand years ago, a hundred years ago, I was a possibility—that a mere nothing might have prevented from coming into existence.

One day I appeared on the earth. Centuries had preceded me; centuries, doubtless, will succeed me. For the present I fill a few short fleeting hours. Then silence will close about me, as deep water engulfs the stone that for a moment has rippled its surface.

This being of mine is as fragile and inconsistent as a vapour which disappears as soon as it arises: *Vapor est modicum parens*. It is only vivified dust: *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es*.

In the light of pure truth, the visible substance of my body and the invisible substance of my soul are alike nothingness, sustained in being only by creative power. Take away for a moment this unseen but necessary action, and my being would faint and vanish away like smoke in the air, like the cloud in the sky, without leaving any trace: *Ad nihilum redactus sum et nescivi*.

“O unknown nothing! O unknown nothing!” cried Blessed Angela of Foligno—cry of profound truth, the summary of our poor greatness, but also the origin of sentiments the most powerful, the most elevated, and the most worthy of God.

If I am nothingness, O Lord, Thou art Being! If I am naught, Thou art All.

This double vision, by its contrasts, forms the rhythm of the songs of heaven. In this celestial light the condition of the blessed appears as similar to my own; but their humility is my shame as well as my lesson. Their glory makes their nothingness ever more and more resplendent in their eyes, while my

many miseries succeed in obscuring mine from me. . . .

II. *The nothingness of action: I can do nothing.*—Our acts are of the same nature as our being. Our being subsists, and we do not see the creative power that sustains it. We act, and we see no more clearly the power that makes action possible. It seems to us that our actions are our very own.

I move my hand or my head, I contrive a thing, I solve a problem, I think, I choose, I love, and all that is positive in these actions is produced far more by the action of God than by mine. It cannot be otherwise. The nature of things demands it; and God, Who can do all things, is unable to give me the power to accomplish a single positive action without Himself; otherwise He would make me a creator. This is a mystery as overwhelming as it is true, a deduction that invades even the sanctuary of my free will.

Even in the resolution I have made to become humble and which seems so exclusively mine, because I might have chosen not to make it, God has acted a thousand times more than myself; and my participation is only to be found in my correspondence with the influence that solicited me.

And if I search into the origin of my correspondence, why I have given it and the strength which has enabled me to give it, once more I find God.

At length, in order to explain how with all this I still remain free, I am forced to say to myself: I feel that I am free, and I know that God is powerful enough to respect my essential liberty while maintaining it to the utmost degree.

If I do evil, the action of God, obeying the general

laws of supreme wisdom, lends its concurrence to all that is positive in what I do, and accompanies me still even to the moment when, divorcing myself from order, I escape from its influence.

Evil is a falling away for which I am responsible; I divert the action of God and hinder its fruition; I force it into strange channels, and finally it is lost.

O Lord, I do not understand myself! Then how vain and absurd is my self-complacence! How foolish my confidence in my own will even when it is strongest! How unjust I am when I attribute to myself any good that I may do! How dare I believe in myself, or prefer myself to another?

The simple veil of the created masks all this nothingness, but the veil is light and a thousand accidents displace it; yet it is sufficient to deceive me. It is, besides, very transparent; but I am careless, and do not discern what it hides. I continue to attribute an absolute reality to human action, and thus bolster up my pride.

Lord, Thou Who seest all things, what dost Thou think of this blind one? Have pity upon him, open his eyes, and make Thine Infinity shine upon his littleness, for he is ashamed of his past pride.

In the midst of success as well as in reverses this sight will give serenity; is it not, then, worth all our trouble? It is the highest wisdom that sets all things in their proper light and true proportion. The shadow of our nothingness throws into relief the greatness of the Being Who is All.

RESOLUTION. — To contemplate frequently the Infinite that envelops me, to lose myself in It, and to

leave there all my pride. To resolve to spend a few moments, morning and evening, on my knees, pondering these beautiful words : " My God and my all."

## SECOND MEDITATION

### EXERCISE IX

#### THE NECESSITY OF ACTUAL GRACE

First point : Its necessity in general.

Second point : The necessity of disposing grace.

Third point : The necessity of concomitant grace.

*Evening Preparation.*—The preceding meditation casts a light upon the meditation of to-morrow.

If, in the order of nature, I am nothing, what am I, then, in the order of grace ? Grace is not a right, and when it is given it does not become a part of my substance ; it remains a divine vesture which at any moment may be stripped from me.

Again, if the natural life needs for its least action the co-operation of God, how much greater is our dependence upon Him for the supernatural life whose actions partake of the divine !

Many Catholics, without suspecting it, hold almost heretical views on the subject of the operating of actual grace. Their error arises from ignorance, and their good faith excuses them, but it is their duty to inform themselves. Grace is not, as they believe, a complement of strength ; it is the first principle of all supernatural action, even of those actions which long use or a personal predilection make extremely easy to us ; this is a dogma of faith.

Seeing our nothingness and our position from this new point of view, we shall not fail to realise that here at least our dependence adds to our greatness; our supernatural life is essentially a dependent life, because it is a participation in the divine life, and God alone is the author and sustainer of it. This condition is ours not only in the present, but will be ours throughout eternity, for God will still be the principle of all our actions. O happy dependence! God Himself will adore, love, and sing through us in an indestructible union approaching unity!

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of a still deeper, though less depressing, sense of my own nothingness.

I. *The necessity of actual grace in general.*—In the supernatural order man is absolutely helpless. Actual grace is as indispensable to him for the least as well as for the greatest actions. “No man can say ‘Jesus’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

We have often heard this truth expressed, and we have accepted it; the Church has made it an article of faith, and we firmly believe it, but do we realise all it means?

To help us to do so, let us take some prominent example, and observe the supernatural life led by a perfect Catholic, a religious or a priest.

He has kept his baptismal innocence, he has served God with unswerving fidelity; he is full of merit, of virtues, and of fervour. His merits have procured for him a marvellous increase of sanctifying grace. His nature is perfectly controlled. His fervour brings his

love into the fullest activity. Should occasion offer, he is capable of showing great heroism.

Yet even such a man would be unable to pronounce the name of Jesus with faith unless immediate grace came to his aid.

"The most perfectly formed eye," said S. Augustine, "can see nothing without the aid of light."

The most holy man can do no good thing without the divine help of the eternal light of grace.

II. *Necessity of predisposing grace.*—Let us draw a comparison from the physical order that will help us.

We will suppose a harp absolutely in tune; we may say that it contains an infinite number of latent melodies, yet to produce them there is constant need of the hand of the harpist.

It is inert and silent, but draw the hand across the strings and they vibrate. Look for the origin of a supernatural action, and you will find predisposing grace. It is this grace that has prompted the thought, the desire, this reawakening of activity, and it is this which has aroused the will.

And in this will, by which the action has been decided upon, let us seek again; we shall find it mysteriously informed with actual grace, without robbing human liberty of its prerogatives.

I will, and it is more God than I Who wills through me.

Harp of so great a Master, docile instrument of His beauteous inspirations, left to thyself thou art not more capable than any other harp of giving forth even the most elementary harmony!

Thou art inert; thou wilt remain mute, though thou art the most perfect soul of a saint.



3. The harp-string struck by the artist vibrates. The soul of the just man, set in motion by grace, commences a supernatural action. Neither the sound nor the action can surpass in strength the impulse that has been received. According to the motion will be the effect. The soul, associating itself with the action, neither adds nor subtracts anything, any more than the harp does.

Where is our part? We co-operate, we lend ourselves, we make the impulse received our own : a mere nothing of which God makes something.

III. *The need for concomitant grace.*—Let us consider one aspect of our incapacity in which it appears more complete than that of the harp. Set in motion, the instrument continues to vibrate for some time. The soul, on the other hand, at once ceases to operate unless the action of grace continues as concomitant grace.

I have commenced a loving deed, for instance ; my lips are already forming expressions of affection ; but if the action of grace ceases, I may continue the words, but they will be cold and empty.

Then truly I can attribute to myself nothing of my own ! Nothing, not even a wish or a simple desire. No, it is contrary to faith. What ! not even the power of meriting this desire, and of obtaining it by the natural efforts of my mind and of my will ? No, this claim would be contrary to faith.

But at least leave me some part, however small ! Did not S. Paul say, " Yet not I, but the grace of God in me." Then I have my share in this supernatural action. Yes, but so small a share that it cannot beget pride, otherwise the Apostle would not have said :



*Quis te discernit?*—"What distinguishes thee from others?" Yes, it is from God that I have received even what I do of my own free will, and even that by which I have freely done it. *Deus est qui operatur in nobis et velle et perficere.*

If it is true that I am a created being, it is strictly true that my nothingness extends to my activity as well as to the depths of my nature.\*

*Reflections and affections.*—Astonishment at our sentiments of pride. A clear view of their error and injustice. The grandeur of humility foreshadowed.

Its place.—It is to be found at the basis of every right action and of every virtue. The need of it is not a merely moral need of the utmost importance.

Humility partakes of the same nature as grace, and is just as indispensable.

The whole of this doctrine may be summed up in these significant words: God has the right to exact humility from us, for He has the right to maintain order in His creation. He cannot properly allow us an atom of pride.

Let us represent to ourselves this just and Sovereign Lord, His hands full of graces, watching to see where He shall bestow them. He is perfectly free to choose, and He may turn away from me. Let us try to

\* It is not the object of this meditation to discuss the opinions of theologians reconciling the liberty of man with the working of God; our dependence and frailty appear in every system of thought; and that is sufficient for us.

To see how is not necessary: what we do not see, we know; and our reasons for belief are well grounded.

Before understanding the manner of God's action in His creatures, we should have to understand how they were produced. Since creation is a mystery, mystery must necessarily envelop its consequences. But on the other hand, the truth of creation invests them with its own certitude.

understand the text: *Deus superbis resistit! . . . Humilibus autem dat gratiam*—"He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

Before Him let us make ourselves very small, and remain very submissive and dependent. We should love to prostrate ourselves in adoration before Him—it is the attitude that becomes us.

And if, before men, such an attitude is inconvenient, let us keep the sentiment of it in our hearts, a deep sense of our own littleness that will at least serve to make us modest in our deportment.

RESOLUTION.—To contemplate in myself the unceasing action of God. To do nothing without Him—a source of joy as well as of humility. To make myself familiar to-day with this thought.

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### EXERCISE X

##### THE NECESSITY OF SPECIAL GRACES

First point : Their necessity in order to persevere in well-doing.

Second point : Applications.

Third point : Humility as the saving virtue.

*Evening Preparation.*—To-morrow we are to approach a subject not only based upon sound reason, but of the greatest importance to humility. We shall see that without special graces, to which we have no real claim, we could not resist certain temptations ; and that, should we succumb to them, without such graces

we could never rise again. Furthermore, simple perseverance in the spiritual life depends absolutely upon their aid.

And it is not only myself, poor, imperfect creature that I am, but the greatest saint among men also lives under this hard condition; like me he, too, must confess his own utter helplessness.

Ah! if only I could realise this as S. Philip Neri did when, each morning, he tremblingly breathed forth this prayer: "O my God! do not trust me. Lay Thy Hand upon my head, for without Thee there is not a fault that I may not be guilty of this day." Now this fear, even in him, was perfectly justified; one act of pride, for instance, depriving him of certain graces, might have led to his fall.

A feeling of fear; a lively sense of my need of God; a desire to sound to its depths this difficult and important truth. These are what are necessary to me.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to feel that profound sense of fear that casts us down at the feet of God broken and submissive.

I. *The need of special graces for perseverance in well-doing.*—Man is assured of receiving all the graces he needs, but he is not certain of corresponding with them. For this he must have special succour, which none of us can claim as strictly our due. This succour consists in the intensity of grace itself.

Listen to the Council of Trent: "Man in a state of grace cannot persevere in this state except by the special help of God."

Let us weigh each word.

1. It concerns man in the state of grace—that is, man possessing the supernatural life, man having the right to ordinary graces.

It seems that such a man should have all that is necessary to the attainment of his end. Yet, considering his frailty, it is not enough.

2. It concerns every man, though he be a saint. But surely a saint has an indubitable right to these graces! Not at all.

3. It is a question not of perfecting or of improving ourselves in this state, but of persevering in it. But can I not maintain myself where I am, and keep what I have, if I desire it with all my heart? No, for without special help even this desire would be lacking.

4. It is a question of real incapability. The holy Council does not say difficulty, or great difficulty; it says impossibility—*non posse*.

II. *Applications*.—Let us meditate upon these conclusions:

1. In order to persevere for any considerable time, a special grace is necessary.

2. In order to persevere in face of great danger, an equal grace is required.

3. The brevity of life is often a special gift.

4. The choice of a favourable moment for our death is always so.

O God, I have perhaps before me some years of existence. I shall be lost if I do not obtain special grace from Thee.

O God, some great danger may assail me suddenly when I am unprepared. If Thy special grace does not support me, I shall succumb to it. O God! I may be unfaithful in my later years, in my old age, on the last

day of my life; I may sin gravely, and without Thy special grace may be surprised by death.

If, falling into mortal sin, I were to lose my soul's life, in myself I have nothing that would enable me to recover it; I could do nothing to deserve that God would give it back to me; I should not even know how to dispose myself properly to receive it, nor how to pray earnestly enough to obtain it, without a special grace!

Let us try to feel clearly what it is to be thus at the mercy of God, to keep ourselves prostrate before Him in an attitude of total dependence, and to dread as a signal impertinence the attitude of pride.

III. *Humility as the saving virtue.*—Fearful and depressed, I cast anxious looks around me. My condition appears unendurable. Sin is the cause of it. . . . I cannot depend on myself. . . . I can expect nothing from Divine justice. Am I faced with an insoluble problem? No, for the Divine Mercy solves it, stooping to my unworthiness with the tenderness of a mother, and reassuring my fears with un hoped-for promises of pardon, help, grace, and even love. And the engagements made by this Divine Mercy are sacred, and constitute an order of mercy as formal as the order of justice.

We must clearly remember this: that if the régime of justice has its laws, that of mercy has also its laws, which are consequent upon its very nature.

Under the rule of justice, right is the condition; under the rule of mercy, humility is the condition. If I will make myself humble, if I will recollect at all times my own helplessness, if I will keep myself from despising others, and if I continue to pray, I shall

fulfil the law, and God, holding to His engagements, will do His part; in spite of my misery, He will love me, He will protect me, He will give me His grace. What I could not claim from His justice I shall infallibly receive from His mercy.

Mercy and humility are correlative terms. Misery abases us as well as humility; but misery is the result of our condition, humility results from our will.

Mercy loves the misery that humbles itself, and rescues it.

I understand now why the Saints attribute the gifts of perseverance to humility.

If I am humble, I remain under the law of universal submission. I dare not make any distinction in God's wishes, and choose to comply only with those which bind under pain of sin. Nor should I murmur in face of difficult duties or sad circumstances, for if I do not strictly owe God certain degrees of submission, neither is He bound to give me certain graces.

The rôle of prayer is very clearly brought out in this connection. By it I may obtain what I neither have nor deserve. The more I feel the weight of these tremendous truths, the more I shall feel the need of prayer. How heartily I shall repeat the cry of the sacred Liturgy: *Deus, in adiutorium meum intende!* How I shall tremble when I repeat: *Et ne nos inducas in tentationem!* How I shall address myself in supplication to those who can intercede for me, to Mary, to the Saints, and to the angels! What a note of faith I shall put into the all-powerful words: "We ask it for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

The grace that I implore at this instant, the grace of graces, is that I may become humble. I shall

incessantly plead for this, and in order to obtain my petition I will be as lowly as the woman of Canaan. I will be humble, for I wish to be saved.

RESOLUTION.—To see myself at the mercy of God, as I am to-day and shall be to-morrow, always, even unto death. At the same time to fear any want of confidence in God Who is my Father.

## FOURTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XI

#### OUR CONDITION

First point : The nature of our liberty.

Second point : Our evil inclinations.

Third point : The world and the devil.

Fourth point : Circumstances.

*Evening Preparation.*—To-morrow's meditation will develop the preceding one, and in a manner illustrate it. An analysis of our position with regard to good and evil will show us the poverty of our own resources to sustain our virtue, and the power of the enemy that seeks its overthrow.

The sight of our precarious position will prove to us the need of special help, and thus to the impression made by the disturbing meditation of yesterday will be added the force of a reasoned conviction.

I will apply all my attention to this research, which I am undertaking not to establish a truth of faith by reasoning, but to increase my knowledge of it.

O my God, can it be a matter of sorrow to one who loves Thee, to own dependence on Thee for salvation ?



O my God, to one who trusts Thee can the sense of utter helplessness be distasteful? O my God, if my misery appears to me to be limitless, Thy mercy is infinite, and this mercy is ever within my reach, so long as I retain the conviction of my own weakness, and am ready to cry: "Pity! O my Father!"

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—In order that conviction may follow, to ask for grace to see clearly the circumstances rendering a special intervention of mercy necessary.

I. *The nature of our liberty.*—Let us first consider the nature of this frail instrument by the aid of which we may make our eternity happy or unhappy—our liberty.

I am conscious of it, with its frequent hesitations and variations; it is disturbed by diverse successive influences, and is profoundly dependent upon the impressions which strike it. Good influences and good motives are needful for its right governance.

Imprudence of choice and a weakness for unwholesome influences will be the means of its undoing. Now I must remember that even after a lifetime of fidelity my liberty remains essentially defectible.

O God, with what joy do I give Thee back my liberty, to subject it to Thy power, to trust it to Thy mercy! Take it, govern it, sustain it, and at need extend to it Thine inexhaustible pardon.

O my God, to address Thee thus is surely to begin to be humble?

II. *Our evil inclinations.*—Among those fatal influences which lead us to abuse our liberty, our inclinations take the first place. They are inherent in



our being. A simple want of balance is their origin. They disguise themselves under countless appearances of good, and if they slumber, they are none the less to be feared, for their awaking may find us self-confident and unarmed. With or without our will they persist in the depths of our nature. Encouraged, they master us; combatted, they remain a latent influence always secretly at work.

Our inclinations tend towards evil rather than towards good. The Church teaches this, experience proves it, and original sin explains it.

Only the sophists hold that man, *au fond*, is always good. He may vaguely wish to be so, but in practice he confuses what is good with what seems good to him, and it is often the latter that he chooses. There again he allows himself to be deceived by appearances, placing his good solely in enjoyment, wishing to enjoy and to enjoy immediately.

This misguided propensity acts upon liberty by illusion and attraction.

We may well be horror-stricken when we look into the depths of ourselves! In order the better to illumine these depths, let us suppose that there is neither hell to dread nor God to love; neither reputation to keep up nor the loss of it to fear; and let us ask ourselves to what pitch we should then carry our excesses and what our life would be. It would be exactly what our inclinations would make it, if they were not restrained. Now these inclinations exist, though under control, and they are, alas! ourselves.

If habit is added to this innate power, what a tyranny we fall under! Liberty is then enslaved and disinherited; horror of evil is no longer operative;

evil inclinations grow, bearing us away like a torrent; the consciousness of past weaknesses robs us of all courage; and what grievous and even despotic habits are formed by our countless failings!

In such a pass, who will succour us? God's mercy alone can do so. And what will attract His mercy? Humility. Persons have been known who, in the midst of an evil career, have repented, and, plunging themselves into humility as into a place of refuge, have not been rejected by the Divine Mercy.

III. *The world and the devil.*—The world that was cursed by the Saviour envelops us like an atmosphere, and penetrates us with its poisons as epidemics do with their infection.

Nothing influences a man so much as the conduct of other men. What everyone does, we instinctively suppose may be done; and argument breaks down before this irrational opinion.

The Saints, who are not such free-thinkers as we are, know the devil's power and the extent of his activity. But his influence is most dangerous to those who are unaware of it. We cannot flee the world nor avoid the devil, but we must be on the watch lest we become enervated by the spirit of the one and fall a victim to the cunning of the other.

The devil is ever ready to take advantage of a favourable opportunity, and our inclinations are only too apt to become his accomplices in his efforts to ensnare our thoughtless liberty.

What will become of us if our pride, alienating us from the Heart of God, leaves us at the mercy of such enemies?

IV. *Circumstances.*—In circumstances such as we

have described, free though we are we shall most certainly succumb.

God knows them all, even the most trying. He measures the degree of resistance we can offer, and He knows that in certain cases this degree, sufficient in itself, will be rendered totally inadequate by our own weakness.

In such cases will He leave us to ourselves or will He deliver us? Once we are engaged in battle, will He come to our aid, or will He permit us to fall? God alone knows. If He removes the danger or strengthens our resistance, it is a grace which is not our due. How complete, then, is our dependence!

O my God, Thou knowest the concourse of events; Thou foreseest those days of idle enervation, when the soul abates her watchfulness and the energy of the will is relaxed. Before Thou dost determine to grant the special help Thou designest, Thou dost survey the dispositions of the soul that is in danger. If Thou seest her humble and submissive, Thou stretchest forth Thy hand and she is saved. If Thou seest her hardened in pride, Thou dost turn away Thy face, and she is lost.

O God, O Father, I have no distrust of Thee! I only fear myself, and I shall not fear myself if I hide myself in the bosom of Thy mercy. I do indeed desire to enter there and never to go out again. I will study lovingly Thy beneficent laws; I will learn to be gentle and indulgent to others as Thou art towards me; to expect no esteem for any excellence in myself, for Thou alone art the Author of it, and it is none of mine.

All the pains of my poor life, every slight, every neglect, every disappointment, and even the deepest

humiliation, I will accept, my God and Father, as the united action of Thy justice and Thy mercy, as the providential means of my present rehabilitation and of my future glory.

O my God, hast Thou not given me Thy Son, Jesus? With Him I am sure of Thee. Living in Him I am sure of myself. O Jesus, visit my nothingness, inform and animate it. Let me live in Thee, love in Thee, and with Thee go forward.

O God, O Father, Thou givest me an overwhelming sense of my helplessness only to draw me to Thine Arms! What happiness to rest there for ever! I depend on Thee and press myself ever more closely to Thine adorable Bosom!

RESOLUTION.—To take pity on my own vain self-confidence, supplicating God to heal my blindness.

### REMARKS ON THE TWO PRECEDING MEDITATIONS

The study of any kind of life, whether it be the life of the soul, the life of the body, or even the humble life of the plant, fills us with astonishment not unmixed with fear. Everything appears so delicate, so complex, so fragile, that every moment we expect to see the organism destroyed by the slightest accident. The perusal of medical books has this effect.

Happily, experience reassures us. Our being appears too frail to exist, yet it does exist; too weak to resist so many destructive agencies, yet it endures. Thus it is in the supernatural order. Its life seems to

be perpetually threatened, yet our knowledge of the facts allays our fears. There is ever in play, as a constant remedy, that marvellous power that we call Providence, but which here may receive the better name of Mercy.

1. As a matter of fact, there is no Christian who has not largely in his power to avoid every mortal sin, and to lift himself up again if he sins.

2. There is not a soul who cannot obtain by prayer all that he needs; and not one who, for a single moment, is deprived of the power to pray.

3. What we cannot, perhaps, do to-day we shall be able to do to-morrow, if we use well every little grace we have. (*Gratiæ remote sufficientes.*)

4. Certain aids which are not strictly our due, will infallibly be given to us; and it is of no consequence to us that they are not ours by right if they are granted to us by favour.

5. At the day of judgment, each soul will be compelled by the evidence to admit that God has been good, and very good, to her; there will have been no exception to this rule, for we are under the dispensation of mercy. Therefore, let us not forget that we are also under the obligation of humility.

## FIFTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XII

## OUR FAULTS

First point : An examination of their cause.

Second point : The judgment assigned to them.

*Evening Preparation.*—Here we set foot on our own territory, for nothing is so much our own as sin. It is ours and ours alone, the only thing in which God is not.

Let us step into this dreary land with courage, and set ourselves to explore it thoroughly.

Too often we have run our eyes absently over it, as if it were a familiar road where nothing can surprise us.

We must learn to see ourselves clearly and to judge ourselves fairly if we are to arrive at our true worth. Do not let us permit ourselves to pass over our humiliating discoveries with this thought : I am not the only one !

Though others may be sinners, are we less guilty ? A prison may be full of criminals, but each individual must bear his own disgrace. Man is confronted with God alone. *Tibi soli peccavi.*

Were he only face to face with himself, with his conscience, his dignity, his ideal, these three great things would accuse him without any regard to like faults committed by other men.

And besides, what is our rank among sinners ? We shall never know until the last day. It is neither the number nor the apparent gravity of faults that deter-

mines the degree of guilt. Farther on we shall see what is the attitude that humility imposes upon us with regard to others; here we are chiefly concerned to ascertain the judgment we ought to pass upon ourselves and upon our work; and if we arrive at a reasonable persuasion of our small personal worth, if we feel abased before God and before our conscience, we shall find it very easy to deny ourselves all contempt for others, all arrogance, and all susceptibility.

We shall have, besides, sufficient logic not to aspire to a particular esteem that we know we do not deserve.

O my God, help me to know myself truly. Disperse the illusions which obscure from me the gravity of my misdeeds, and keep me from exaggerations which will hinder me from arriving at the truth. I wish to judge myself as Thou Thyself judgest me.

I will not set out with the preconceived idea that in order to be humble, it is necessary to believe oneself ill and miserable; I will study the matter coldly, with the freedom of an independent mind, and with the minute care of one who is bent solely on the quest for truth, and on arriving at just conclusions.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of clear illumination on my life, and great loyalty in judging it.

I. *The examination of causes.*—1. Deeds.—This is a kind of general confession, renewed before God alone. It is a secret and sorrowful review of the actions of our arbitrary liberty.

It is a good plan to divide the life into successive periods, and to pause upon the dominating feature of each.



It should be possible to arrive at an approximate number of faults, at least of grave faults.

We will fix our attention on the most humiliating faults, if our imagination is not likely to suffer from it.

2. Motives.—The true ones, those we do not avow. The motives of faults are always bad ; some are worse than others, some are abominable. In the main, it is for self-gratification that we have sinned.

Even in our good actions we shall find corrupt motives. Sometimes we shall find that they have been inspired by the craving to appear better than we are.

3. Graces.—Side by side with the story of ingratitude runs the story of mercy : the privilege of a religious education, favourable environment, graces of piety, even of fervour, graces of preservation. What should we have been without them ? Repentance long awaited and almost miraculously granted. Let us count the number of our absolutions . . . and of our fresh falls. . . . If we had not counted upon this ready pardon, perhaps we should have sinned less.

We should feel astonishment that God's Providence should have been so good and so persevering, and a still greater astonishment at our ingratitude and persistent estrangement, . . . and we were not even happy !

Our attitude to-day is not exactly that of repentance, but it is that of humility. *Peccatum meum contra me est semper*. Faults may be effaced, and perhaps their effects ; but deeds never.

II. *The judgment assigned*.—I. From the point of view of our personal worth, what trust do we deserve ?

Trust can be placed only in uprightness of character and firmness of soul.



Now, to be continually alternating from faults to repentance, and from repentance to fresh faults, is not to govern our lives.

To succumb to the least temptation, sometimes without resistance, just because, after a short time, tiresome habits return, is not to be masters of ourselves.

We have willed to do better, and so we fancy we have changed, and then we have fallen again. What does our will count for? We say to ourselves again and again: "How foolish I am!" and yet reason, that sees so clearly, has no power to control us.

Sometimes the lower instincts gain such an ascendancy over reason itself that they furnish it with false justifications.

Truly evil has too often been my master, and I have no right to self-confidence.

2. From the point of view of personal dignity, have we any claim to honour?

Honour is allied to dignity. Now dignity demands that we hold to our rank without derogating from it, and that we unfalteringly adhere to our word.

How many times and to what extent have I not disgraced my Christian dignity, and perhaps even my dignity as a man?

I have allowed derogatory principles to enter my soul and to affect the dispositions of my body.

Have not caprice, passion, egotism, and pride too often replaced as motives the noble love of goodness?

And still I would fain believe myself worthy of honour!

Is he worthy of honour who is a breaker of his word?

I have given pledges in full cognisance of their meaning, pledges to conscience, to my confessor, to

my God. The breaking of a single pledge would dishonour a man of the world, and I cannot count the number of my defections.

In truth, have I not lost all personal dignity? and to what honour can I aspire?

3. From the point of view of my ideal, how do I stand?

My ideal was my possible history, written by the goodness of God; it was the series of gifts which were to have been offered to me if I were faithful. It was the perpetual growth of my personality, and my destiny that should have grown ever more and more beautiful with time.

What an ideal!—and to what a condition has it given place! Graces rendered fruitless, effort refused, diminution everywhere. After each absolution, the plan restored, though on a smaller scale, but again disfigured by failure.

I see God working incessantly to remake it, and myself working no less industriously to *un*-make it.

The ideal realised would have meant the embellishment and elevation of my whole being. What have I made of it? And what am I? Ugliness and baseness—what a contrast!

Gradually the action of God in me has decreased in power; His image has faded; His joy has gone out!

Ah! I have no refuge but in confusion, confession, and repentance. I have no refuge except in the sincerest humility!

O magnanimous God, Thou wilt not strike him who humbles himself even to the dust. O God of pity, pity the beggar who has naught but the rags of his poverty to show Thee.

In this poor man, O heavenly Father, behold the features, the disfigured features, of Jesus, Thy well-beloved Son! Thou wilt not ignore His likeness in me. Have compassion on His glory. His glory? Oh! how pure and great it will be if from a miserable being Thou wilt make a new creature, good and beautiful, strong and tender, confident and generous, and above all humble.

Put far from me in the future all my faults, I desire never to commit another; but, if it must be so, leave me some humbling weakness; leave me above all a lively sense of my own unworthiness, that it may accompany me in my progress and in the success of my zeal, stimulating continually my gratitude, my desire for reparation, and in a profound humility that sacred love which is Thy life and mine, the divine fruit of Thy mercy and delight of my repentance!

RESOLUTION.—To feel the confusion of an unhappy being appearing before a tribunal, and who has there to face grievous accusations. To keep this impression throughout the day.

## SIXTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XIII

PRAYER EDITED BY POPE URBAN VIII.

*(Placed at the beginning of the Roman Breviary.)*

*Evening Preparation.*—In this meditation we shall seek to establish ourselves in humility, rather by the sincere and ardent expression of our feelings than by the aid of reasoning.

In acquiring a virtue, to be convinced of our need of it is of the first importance; but sentiment is, perhaps, a more powerful lever. It stirs the whole soul, and even deepens our consciousness of our need. Conviction belongs to the intelligence, but the expression of a sentiment is an act of the will, and it is in the will that virtue is formed and perfected.

We shall have but one aim to-morrow: to plunge ourselves into humiliation. With the heartfelt words of a saint, we will deplore our ingratitude, our ever-recurring egotism, our countless failures; and also, with a great access of confidence, we will throw ourselves unreservedly upon God's mercy, surrendering ourselves to Jesus our Saviour.

O my God, grant me to-morrow a warmer heart, a softened heart, a heart at least striving to feel. I do not ask Thee for tears, but for real sorrow. O my God, bestow upon my soul that inclination towards humility that alone can make me humble, but grant me also that confidence which alone can make me valiant.

I am full of faults and wretchedness of myself, but by Thy grace I may obtain the riches and beauty of Jesus. O, Life of Jesus, like a divine seed, deign to thrust Thy roots into the soil of our wretchedness; one day Thou shalt blossom in heaven.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of a sincere repentance. *Ante oculos tuos, Domine, culpas nostras ferimus.* Weighed down and depressed, we place before Thine eyes, O just God our Father, the heavy burden of our faults! *Et plagas quas accepimus conferimus*—"And we show Thee the wounds made by our sins." They

disfigure us, they make us suffer, they keep us in a state of pitiable weakness, for they are many, deep, and badly dressed.

*Si pensamus malum quod fecimus, minus est quod patimur, majus est quod meremur.* My head bowed down, my lips that kiss Thy feet, my tears that bathe them, the pity I implore, all cry to Thee that I recognise my faults, and that I accept the punishment. The trials of my present life, those that the future holds, all together are nothing compared with my deserts. *Gravius est quod commisimus, levius est quod toleramus.*

*Peccandi pœnam sentimus et peccandi pertinaciam non vitamus.* Inconceivable cowardice! Under the sting of punishment I burn with indignation against myself, but under renewed temptation I find myself as feeble as before.

Despite the graces that I have received, the resolutions I have made, the many chastisements I have suffered; despite my penitence and my regret, despite my oft-renewed aspirations, evil still has the power to conquer me, to lift its head again when trials pass!

*In flagellis nostris infirmitas nostra teritur et iniquitas non mutatur*—Thou breakest us and we are not changed; we are bruised and persist in wrongdoing! *Mens ægra torquetur et cervix non flectitur*—Sad, sick, tortured, still we will not bend.

*Vita in dolore suspirat, et opere non se emendat*—Our life is wasted in sorrow and lamentation, and we find no way of return!

O human heart, O heart of mine, how feeble thou art, and easily led astray! How inconstant and changeable! Thou dost suffer from evil-doing, and

thou wilt to suffer still more; thou knowest thyself sick, and thou dost not sincerely seek a cure!

Thou groanest in thy fetters, yet thou dost cling to them!

*Si expectas, non corrigimur.* O Lord, Thy patience is long-suffering, and by my fault it is useless! Thou dost wait and we do not correct ourselves.

*Si vindicas, non duramus*—If Thou becomest a God of vengeance, we cannot endure it.

*Confitemur in correctione quod egimus, obliviscimur post visitationem quod flevimus*—Thou comest to chastise us, and we confess our faults; Thou withdrawest Thyself, and presently we forget what we have bewailed!

*Si extendas manum, facienda promittimus: si suspenderis gladium, promissa non solvimus*—Thou extendest Thy hand, and we promise everything; Thou withdrawest the sword, and we are forsworn.

*Si ferias, clamamus ut parcas, si peperceris, peccamus ut ferias*—Thou strikest and we cry for pardon, and again we provoke Thy blows!

*Habes, Domine, confitentes reos! novimus quod nisi dimittas, recte non perimus.* Ah! at least, Lord, I do not excuse myself; I am guilty and I freely confess it. This avowal solaces me; it is the unloading of my conscience, in view of my endless falls and incessant provocations! If Thou dost not take pity on me I am lost, and justly so!

*Præsta, Pater omnipotens, sine merito quod rogamus, qui fecisti ex nihilo, qui te rogarent per Christum, Dominum nostram.* O Almighty Father, this being whom Thou hast created from nothing beseeches Thee! He is without merit, but since Thou

Thou hast bestowed the grace of prayer, use Thy right to pardon. Thou puttest in my mouth the accents that will touch Thee; Thou arimest my prayer with a name that compels Thee; Thou seest in me Him Whom Thou lovest, Jesus, by Whom I pray.

In this long litany of our miseries, let us study the action of humility.

It is humility that speaks, that groans, that touches. It is humility that gives to God His rightful place, and to us the attitude that befits us.

It is to the tears of humility that mercy stoops, and it is on her head that pardon descends.

It is humility that causes Jesus to put Himself in the place of our sorry personality.

Should pride wish to raise its head, what confusion and what punishment! Pride could never soften the heart of God, nor our own!

"Our misery is the throne of the mercy of God," said S. Francis de Sales.

The road from the Heart of God to ours, and of ours to His, is humility.

As soon as they are touched by the reflection of this virtue, our miseries take on a hue of supernatural beauty. As soon as they are touched by mercy, they are transformed in love.

RESOLUTION.—To entertain a profound and sweet sense of the goodness of God. "I will sing of Thy mercies for ever."



## SEVENTH MEDITATION—(1)

## EXERCISE XIV—(1)

## IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SAINTS

NOTE.—If thirty days only are given to these exercises, the two following meditations may be taken together. Though traversing different roads, they meet at the same point: the lively sense of our humiliating mediocrity.

*Evening Preparation.*—What effect should I look for from a contemplation of the virtues of the Saints? A keen sense of my littleness, and also a stimulus to my laxity, for a humility that destroys false pretensions excites true courage.

In the presence of the virtue of the Saints we are overpowered by a sense of greatness, such as we experience at the foot of a high mountain or in sight of the ocean. But we must not be satisfied with this general impression, we must pass on to an examination of the details of their superiority, their virtues, their sentiments, their works, . . . and at the same time consider *our* virtues, *our* sentiments, *our* works!

In an uneducated society the man who can read prides himself on his accomplishment. Do you admire him? No; then beware of a vain esteem which sets you above your fellows.

But must we compare ourselves with the Saints, whose lives were exceptional, if we are to form a just appreciation of our worth? Yes, since we pretend to a special esteem. In fact, the measure of desert is found in what is exalted and not in what is mediocre.



For what matter for pride is there in being a little less debased than some poor wretch?

In the presence of all superiority, one of two feelings may be aroused: that of despair, which, feeling itself unable to reach such a height, gives up the attempt; or that of courage, true greatness of soul, which repeats with S. Augustine, "Can I not do what others have done?" Tears of holy emulation fill the eyes, an almost violent emotion swells the breast, and, with eyes directed to heaven, we cry: "I can do all in Him Who strengthens me!"

The proud man reflects upon his own insufficiency, and sinks down; the humble considers the Divine strength, and casts himself upon it. Oh! Thou Who makest Saints, commence to fashion me to humility. I shall be in Thy hands like common but malleable clay, lending itself to receive the likeness of Thine image.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of such a vision of the moral beauty of the Saints, that I shall feel nothing but a profound self-contempt.

*The Apostles.*—S. Peter, S. Andrew, S. Paul. They belong no more to themselves, the Spirit of God possesses and governs them; their zeal extends over the whole world and stoops to the lowest slave.

Weariness, persecution, the sword only stimulate them; scourgings rejoice them; miracles accompany them. Towns, peoples, fall at their feet. They die and are buried in obscurity, the time and place of their martyrdom often remaining unknown.

And what of my zeal? my courage? my abnegation?

my divine conquests? my personal gifts? I regard them with pity! and the thought of my pride covers me with confusion! Yet I accept praise, and I am complacent about the little things I do.

What a humiliation, to set myself beside an Apostle and to measure myself by him!

*The Virgin Martyrs.*—S. Lucy, S. Agnes, S. Agatha. They loved Jesus only, and they loved Him with holy passion. Their souls are a heaven in which a pure and gentle light is diffused. Not a shadow of an unworthy thought. Love has gone on growing until it has left no room for dreams of sense. Never would they belong to a mortal being. Smiling, they bow the head to the executioner; to die is to be with Jesus. *O quam pulchra est casta generatio cum claritate!*—"How beautiful is this noble race in its dazzling purity!"

Let us set our own souls and our own lives beside this whiteness, this peace, this gentle love: imaginations, dreams, torments, struggles, . . . all the past that I have forgotten but which God remembers.

Ah! how can we be proud of our virtue, preserved perhaps, perhaps restored, but always so imperfect!

*The Hermit Saints.*—S. Anthony, S. Pacomius, S. Hilary. Let us follow them into the desert.

Silence and forgetfulness envelop them! The eye of God is the only star that lights their way; their prayer is almost continuous, and sleep and food are curtailed to a degree only just sufficient to preserve life. They undertake terrible mortifications each day, each night, their whole life through.

Let me see myself beside them, enjoying every comfort of life! Perhaps my health demands it. But

it would be absurd for anyone to think I am mortified or to suppose it myself. Ah! how easy it should be for me to be humble and lowly!

*The Doctors of the Church.*—S. Ambrose, S. Augustine, S. Chrysostom, S. Thomas. Their knowledge is so wide that even we of the present day are confounded by it. The influence they exercised in their own period, and that they will continue to exercise until the end of time, testifies to their high worth.

And yet I am conceited about my little knowledge—shallow and of small worth, very limited, and just what is to be found in countless books.

I should rejoice immoderately to see that my influence was felt a hundred paces off!

*The Contemplatives.*—These form the supreme hierarchy of souls: S. Francis of Assisi, S. Catherine, S. Theresa. What ascents! what heights! what visions! what flights!—and in their service of God, what love! what union! Purity, brilliant lucidity, in all their intellectual faculties; fiery affections; supreme detachment; marvellous celestial favours; souls in a sense melted and liquefied, moulding themselves marvellously to the fashion of the heart of God!

On my knees, my eyes raised to heaven, I watch the unfolding of this vision, and in its light I behold myself dull and coarse. Can I be of the same nature as these wondrous beings? What kind of prayers are mine, and what is their result? What is my attention to God? Is my love ever growing purer, higher, more intimate, warmer, brighter?

*The Unknown Souls.*—They have passed their lives in work, in prayer, in suffering. They did good so

quietly that it was never noised abroad. God alone knows what graces have been bestowed at their intercession. Others have reaped the harvest that they have sown.

What heroism has been shown by poor women struggling with the harshness of existence !

They looked calm and were supposed to be happy—and so they were indeed, but in another way. We have perhaps known such ; have we appreciated them ?

RESOLUTION.—To keep in mind one of these great groups of holy souls, and to think of them many times during the day.

## SEVENTH MEDITATION—(2)

### EXERCISE XIV—(2)

#### IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

*Evening Preparation.*—Our aim in this meditation is to extinguish the vain lights of self-esteem by a contemplation of the beauty of the Infinite. We must try to reserve some long time for this meditation, and to keep ourselves in great interior peace. We need long and close attention if we are to understand anything of the mysterious splendour of the Supreme Being.

We must be wholly detached in our interior as well as our exterior senses, that we may be open to those sights that are beyond sense.

Consider one by one the Divine perfections, and set beside them your own poverty and ugliness.

This comparison is easy, suggestive, and convincing, and it will fill you with sentiments of confusion that will influence your practical life.

To feel oneself abased and annihilated before God is to dispose oneself not to value self before others.

This evening, notice what are the most unworthy tendencies and the most humiliating faults of your life, and propose to yourself to contrast them with the Divine perfections in such a manner as will best show up their ugliness: inalienable purity opposed to our stains, serene immutability opposed to our inconstancy, sovereign peace to our agitations and troubles, etc.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to feel such a sense of the Divine grandeur as will absorb all feeling of vain personal esteem.

From the contemplation of the Saints let us ascend to the contemplation of God. Before the perfection of God the sanctity of man appears as a drop of water compared with the majestic ocean, or a tiny night-light with the brightness of the sun.

To the greater number of souls, the mysterious abysses of the Divine attributes, where thought loses itself in ravishment, are a sealed book. The heart needs great purity to plunge into their depths, and the intellect entire attention to understand their silences.

We will not here attempt to trace the route to those abysses, and those who have found the way of light will need no aid. But we may be allowed to contrast our littleness with such majesty, as a painter places a

man at the foot of a great monument in order to give a true idea of its size.

O God, Thou art all-powerful, and I am infinitely weak !

Thou art immensity, and I occupy an imperceptible point in space !

Thou art wisdom, peace, harmony, measure ; and I am error, improvidence, haste, trouble, disorder !

Thou art sanctity, pure, exalted, complete, the imperious enemy of all evil ; while I am defect, lust, sin !

Thou art immutability ; what Thou art, Thou remainest always ; what Thou thinkest, what Thou willest, Thou thinkest, Thou willest, eternally. While I am nothing but inconsistency and instability.

My impressions and my tastes change like a passing cloud !

Thou art beauty, without flaw, without shadow, without decline ; everything which on earth delights, enchants, and beguiles us from ourselves, is but a dim reflection of Thy ravishing beauty !

The vault of heaven of azure blue, with its pensive stars ; soft winds of spring, drunk with the perfume of a thousand flowers ; noble voices of the forests and the waters ; streams of light filling every place with brightness ; the whole concert of nature — what are you ? A little movement, an appearance, a nothing.

Soul of man, genius of man, what are you ? A higher reflection of the eternal Intelligence, but only a reflection : heart of man, source of all our feelings, spring of our generousities, greater, higher than all in thy love, thou art but a spark in comparison with the infinite Love !

This comparison of the perfections of God with our

unspeakable miseries provokes two kinds of reflections and sentiments :

1. What am I beside Him ? What absurdity to compare myself with Him ! How empty is pride !

2. What does it mean to offend God ? It is to attack all His perfections, and they rise against us and condemn us, for of what an injury, a profanation and folly, are we guilty !

How sweet and gentle will that humility be that is the outcome of these two considerations—the consideration of God, and the consideration of myself.

A glance towards God fills me with confidence and ravishment ! A glance at myself must make me sad, but grateful and above all humble. How well might we cry with S. Francis all through the night : “ My God and my all ! My God and my all ! ”—the expression of a humility full of love and of adoration.

RESOLUTION.—To be ashamed of my rags, but still more ashamed of my pride, and to feel a holy emulation, for is not God given to me to be my model ? What is wanting to the Almighty to make me a saint ? Great humility on my part. /





THIRD WEEK

JESUS HUMBLE



## PREPARATION FOR THE THIRD WEEK

WE must make these meditations respectfully : Jesus is God ; with docility : Jesus is Master ; with confidence : Jesus is good.

He calls us in order to train us Himself. O sweet initiation ! O sweet commerce ! O sweet hope ! He has His examples, His lessons, and His secrets !

By His example He walks before us to show us how to be humble.

By His words He explains His example.

In His secrets He reveals to us the humility of His Heart : *Mitis sum et humilis corde* ; and He keeps this secret for those who are lowly and for those who desire to be so. *Revelasti ea parvulis.*

The heart is a fire, and its heat at times becomes its light ; we must meditate effectively. But, better than the heart, grace is our light, and we must draw its radiance into ourselves.

O Holy Spirit, Creator, create in me purified desires and thoughts, a new heaven and a new earth. Teach me Jesus. "Give to me of Jesus" : *De meo accipit et annuntiabit vobis.* I wish to be humble like Jesus and to love Him.

This week will advance us in the knowledge of humility, putting in a clearer light truths already meditated, and extending our view of them. It will excite us to the practice of this virtue by the force of the most authoritative example.

May it truly transform our heart, that it may also transform our life !

## I

To the end that these meditations may exercise upon our resolutions the full extent of their influence, let us disengage ourselves from certain ideas which represent the actions and sentiments of Jesus as being too much outside our own condition to serve for an example to us.

Certainly the state to which the soul of Jesus is exalted by His personal union with the Word is so different from ours that it is impossible for us to state precisely its nature and its laws. Expressions fail us ; but if the far horizon is lost to view, the nearer prospect is in sight. Let us approach this.

The aspect of Jesus suffering and humiliated suggests two inquiries. Could He really suffer?—He Who even here on earth enjoyed the Beatific Vision ! Could He, Who knew Himself to be so great, sincerely entertain lowly opinions of Himself ? Externally humiliation and suffering were evident ; but did they affect Him interiorly ? Were they not perhaps simply appearances designed to give us a great lesson of example ?

At any rate, if these humiliations and sufferings were real, Jesus had His divine virtue to support Him. He was the Infinite, the all-powerful, the pre-eminently strong ; and as for me, I am only a poor little creature full of weakness ! His humility accorded with His stature. . . . I can scarcely raise my eyes high enough to contemplate His greatness, how can my life hope to attain to it ? Let me fall on my knees in

admiration of such a prodigy, but do not ask me to reproduce it.

## II

According to such a view, the humility of Jesus was only an appearance, an ornament, a lifeless model! and His example can have no power to arouse my emulation, for it belongs to conditions different from my own. But such a view is false, utterly false. The humility of Jesus, my Brother, is not merely an appearance, nor an example which is out of my reach, with which God deceives me. Could the God of justice force us to submit to humiliations which He had not Himself suffered? Could the God of wisdom impose on us a burden which His divine shoulders alone could bear?

Jesus felt the shame of humiliation with that natural repulsion which the sense of personal dignity inspires; and He accepted it, as we shall presently see, with a feeling of its justice.

These two conditions were indeed necessary: to feel, and to accept—to feel really in His man's heart, to accept freely with His will, as a submissive Son—if His humility was to be a virtue, and His acts were to possess any merit.

The Soul of Jesus resembled our soul as His Body resembled our body. Both were made of the same elements as are ours; His Body had blood, nerves, and organs like ours; His Soul like ours was endowed with intelligence, will, and sensibility.

If our human blood ran in His veins, our human feelings palpitated in His heart.

## III

Two great differences, nevertheless, may be seen in His manner of feeling and ours; but these two differences only add force to His example. Jesus, better endowed than we are, felt more keenly; Jesus, more virtuous than we are, accepted more filially.

We know that the richer the nature, the greater the capacity for suffering: elevation gives a clearer vision; greater refinement seizes the least shades; greater constancy makes forgetfulness impossible.

Thus our adorable Jesus has suffered all the more, and has all the more right to offer us His actions and His sentiments as true examples.

Doubtless, His example will always leave us far behind, and we shall be outdone not only by the greatness of His actions, but by the perfection of His self-sacrifice. Jesus foresaw suffering and loved it—*Desiderio desideravi.*

But, then, where was the merit if it cost Him nothing? if He did it all for love?

Since when has love that makes everything easy been regarded as decreasing merit?

Do we feel less gratitude for an affection whose warmth makes a happiness of stanching our wounds or of sacrificing to us its joys? Since when has virtue that also makes every duty light, deprived actions of their merit? In that case an increase of Divine love and virtue would lessen the worth of our actions!

If the actions of Jesus were determined by His immense love, they were determined freely if sorrowfully, for in Jesus, we must remember, it was not the Divinity Who felt but our human nature, a nature

more sensitive than ours and more accessible to suffering. Then do not let us say : "I am not God, I cannot do what the Almighty has done." We have before us not God alone, but the Son of man ; and it is He Who offers Himself for our imitation.

## FIRST MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XV

#### THE INFANCY AND HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS THE HUMILITY OF SELF-EFFACEMENT

*Evening Preparation.*—In this meditation we shall see the humility of Jesus appearing in the quiet light of His hidden life ; in the touching mysteries of His birth, of His presentation, of His flight into Egypt ; and in the long monotonous years that flowed slowly by in the voluntary eclipse of Nazareth.

Thirty years out of thirty-three. What a marked preference ! Jesus has come to speak to men, and they are all about Him ; though He is only a child, He has an eloquent tongue ; His young heart burns with ardent zeal, . . . yet He is silent. Could He do anything better than save souls ?—or rather, in order to save them, could He employ any better means than to show Himself and to act ?

Yes, for it is humility that, by stripping a man of all selfish preoccupation which hinders the Divine action, by rendering him insensible to what is hard and disconcerting, and by keeping his heart tender and considerate towards others, paves the way to success.



But, for the acquisition of humility, human nature needs time and many victories over self. Jesus knew that our eagerness needed this lesson.

True humility also tends to self-effacement. Obscurity is her chosen place, the place where she is at ease; she tends towards it with all the force of her nature, and will remain in it if she is not called forth by God. *Ama nesciri*—"Love to be unknown."

This sacred and silent retreat is like a sanctuary where God reveals Himself and gives Himself more intimately. How can God refuse His favours to a heart that is full of love?

To-morrow we will read the sacred passages which tell of that period in the life of Jesus that was entirely filled with gentle humility, a period so calm and touching and beautiful.

O Mary, Joseph, and the holy angels, you who were the only witnesses of this self-annihilation, lend me your eyes and your hearts that I may worthily contemplate Jesus in His humility.

### MEDITATION

FIRST PRELUDE.—To represent to ourselves the contrast between the vast and shining heavens where the Word reigns, and that poor corner of the cold earth to which the Saviour descends. To cast our eyes towards the uncreated splendour on high, and then to contemplate on earth the humility of a comfortless stable.

SECOND PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to realise deeply the love of Jesus for all that is humbling, and to see in His unnecessary self-abasement a supreme lesson for myself.

## I

*Et Verbum caro factum est.* Let us compare the two terms: The Word, the glorious image of the Father; and the flesh, vivified dust, the lowly flesh of man. The one approaches the other until union is accomplished. This phrase *factum est*, seems to imprison, to hide the Word in the flesh, and, as it were, to annihilate it.

*Exinanivit semetipsum!* This first act was God's alone, those that followed belonged to the Man-God.

*Edictum a Cæsare.* Behold Him, even before His birth, submissive to a master; He accepts his exactions; Cæsar is to have another subject, and Jesus is to have neither dwelling nor cradle. Thus He wills it, thus He has chosen.

*Non erat eis locus in diversorio.* This was quite natural: they were poor and they were turned away.

*Reclinavit eum in præsepio.* The trough where the animals fed became His cradle; a handful of straw supported and surrounded His tender little body. Gentle Child, asleep in the crib, You seem to repose in humility!

*Pastores erant in regione illa.* Some herdsmen, poor people, these were the first to whom He gave an audience. He prefers them because He is humble.

*Et hoc vobis signum.* The littleness of the Saviour-God is to be His sign: *invenietis infantem*, a little child without word or look. *In præsepio*, like a feeble lamb in His nest of straw.

The shepherds adore Him and return home. Jesus remains unconscious. We are not told that the shepherds said anything, but if they did no one

listened to them—they were such insignificant folk. Jesus only quits the stable to go into a poor house close by.

The angels have proclaimed the Messiah, but they have not drawn away the veils with which humility covers Him.

## II

*Postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis.* Forty days pass. They go to Jerusalem, alone, for no one is interested in them.

In the Temple, however, they are welcomed by some prophets; Simeon, venerated by the people, declares Him to be the Light of nations, and Anna speaks of Him to those who are expecting the Redeemer of Israel.

It is a momentary glory, and then the veil of humility once more enwraps Him; and when the Magi come to seek Him in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who has received Him in her temple, does not even know Him.

The repose of the city is troubled all day by the caravan of these sons from the East. Sages declare that the Messiah should be born, and born at Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is only two leagues away, yet no one hastens thither, nor accompanies the Magi there. What extraordinary indifference!

*Surge, fuge.* In the middle of the night a voice rings out: "Joseph, arise, take the child and flee!"

Is this all that God will do for His Son? Think of the power of the Almighty, and admire in Jesus His resolute will to be accounted as nothing.

The return into Galilee is just as dependent, obscure, and humble.

## III

Nazareth, with its long years of oblivion, is next shown to us, a little village hidden in verdure, with two or three streets in which strangers are seldom seen, the silence of the houses only interrupted at intervals by the monotonous sound of some implements of toil. And in this obscure spot, where the days and the hours pass so slowly away, Jesus, the hidden God, dwells, unknown by those who employ Him, by those who hear Him! Mary and Joseph alone are there to adore Him, but neither do they reveal Him. His life is simply the life of a child of poor parents, nothing more! To the soul that sets herself in meditation to reproduce the scene and the details of each day, infinite prospects unfold themselves.

She sees what passes, hears what is said, and contemplates the veritable humility that is displayed in all those unnoticed actions.

O Jesus, Thy desire for annihilation is so evident and so persistent that it impresses my heart and my mind.

O Jesus, "the Way, the Truth, and Life," have pity on my pride that misleads and torments me!

Accustom me so to love Thee, that the neglect of creatures is no longer bitter to me. Teach me to efface myself, that I may attract Thee; defend me from the impulsive desire to act and to succeed.

For thirty years Thou dost prolong Thy lesson, in order to teach me to keep the spirit of it, not merely on occasion or from time to time, but every day of my life.

What hast Thou found so delightful in obscurity

that Thou didst not desire to leave it? There Thou hast found the Infinite, for in the shade Its brightness shines forth, and in the silence Its voice is heard.

RESOLUTION.—To wait until the hand of God draws me out of silence and obscurity.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XVI

#### PUBLIC LIFE. HUMILITY IN ACTION

First point : The humility of Jesus was simple.  
Second point : It was magnanimous.

*Evening Preparation.*—In order fully to profit by this meditation, we must realise that in the active life humility changes its rôle; it no longer tends to effacement, but acts as a safeguard.

When God calls it to action, it folds itself up in the heart without suffering decrease, and there brings its useful influence to bear upon the exercise of the other virtues, imparting to them that stamp of simplicity and personal disinterestedness that gives them their power.

To be humble in obscurity is comparatively easy, but to remain humble under the stress of public activity demands solid virtue and wise caution. To delight in praise and the sight of the good we do is such a subtle poison!

To exalt oneself to the level of a high position, and to change our attitude as we rise, is a common temptation to which many yield. Is it not proper that we

should show ourselves, talk, do, and make a success of things? Is it not right to show an imposing appearance?

O Jesus, Thou wilt enlighten me by Thy example. If I love Thee, it will be easy to me to follow it and to be steadfast.

O Jesus, to put Thee in place of self and to keep Thee within me, to act only for Thee and by Thee, is the ideal of humility in the active life.

### MEDITATION

FIRST PRELUDE.—Composition of place. Contemplate Jesus leaving Nazareth without noise, as He has lived there. The humility of His thirty obscure years does not satisfy Him, He wills to commence His ministry by more obvious humiliations. Let us watch Him setting off on the road to the Jordan, mixing with the crowd of publicans, and receiving the baptism of sinners. Let us then follow Him into the desert, where He submits to the companionship of wild beasts, and the contact of the devil, allowing him to tempt Him as if He were a soul liable to fall.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Let us ask the grace to be freed from all self-confidence and dangerous self-complacency in the esteem of others.

I. *The humility of Jesus was simple.*—His humility has all the brilliance of truth, and all the charm of simplicity. His approach is heralded by nothing surprising; His dress is poor, His gait modest, His head slightly bowed.

Whether He looks, or speaks, or acts, all is perfectly natural; Jesus does not pose.

His entourage.—There are people in working dress,

little children and their mothers, despised publicans, and even people who have lost their reputations. He prefers these; He draws them to Himself and lifts them up again, and has for them treasures of indulgence.

How can this same Heart feel such indignant repulsion? Jesus hates pride, and He is pitiless to the proud Pharisees. He takes into account neither their probity, nor their alms, nor their respect for the law, nor their lengthy prayers. Virtue inspired by pride only fills Him with horror.

His life is a daily privation; He has "no stone whereon to lay His head"; poor people receive Him into their houses; poor women provide for His needs. For His preaching He asks neither temple nor pulpit; a hillock of grass, the angle of a street, the side of a boat, suffice Him.

His language is so simple in its grandeur that all can understand Him. It is so clear, and its truth shines so radiantly, that the words seem to disappear. He borrows the expressions, the customs, even the ideas of the people.

Nothing is farther from studied elegance than His discourses.

And His virtue, how simple it is! Habitually Jesus manifests nothing extraordinary. He leads an ordinary life, He eats and drinks like everyone else. He has His hours of weariness.

When He wishes to give Himself up to long meditations He withdraws to a mountain.

Doubtless, His perfect virtue betrayed itself at every turn, but it was so entirely natural that it created no astonishment, like a monument whose harmonious proportions disguise its great size.



II. *The humility of Jesus was magnanimous.*—As soon as the hour designed by His Father has struck, Jesus comes forth from obscurity, shows Himself, speaks, and surrounds Himself with disciples. He gains the crowd and makes the authorities tremble. He heals the sick, raises the dead, and stills the tempest. Yet He does these things quite naturally; He seeks no honour, nor does He flee from gibes; to both alike He appears indifferent.

We must admire this magnanimous humility that frees the soul from all pusillanimity and from all hesitation. Listen to the Divine Master revealing His secret. "My Father in Me, He doeth the work." An instrument must not resist, an instrument cannot be puffed up.

Humility, when it is true, makes the heart generous. Before a superior will, it permits neither refusal nor reserve; it inspires a desire for good that has God for its sole object, and a confidence that expects everything from Him.

Humility that has not this character is insincere or incomplete.

Jesus appears and speaks with authority—*tanquam potestatem habens*. He appears for what He is, He says what it is His mission to say. He has none of those timidities that arise from self-consciousness, nor those set phrases for humility that often contain a secret pride.

This example gives us some important lessons.

When we undertake a mission, let us forget ourselves and make ourselves forgotten. Let God alone appear, and souls be saved.

We are not to attract attention by too much repeat-

ing that we are incapable and unworthy. What does it matter about ourselves? Let us lend to God what we hold from Him, and let the feeling of our nullity go on growing with the success of our work.

At the end of his life, S. Francis of Assisi allowed the crowds to kneel before him and to kiss the sacred stigmata. A brother showed surprise at this. "Ah!" said the Saint, "I do not deceive myself. It is not I whom they come here to see. I receive this homage but I give it all back to God."

RESOLUTION.—In the good that I am called to do to see only God, and to see Him unceasingly. The danger of self-seeking, even in the most fleeting sentiment of complacency.

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### EXERCISE XVII

#### HUMILITY OF THE HEART OF JESUS

First point : Mystery of this humility in Jesus.

Second point : Humility produced by the feeling of His nothingness.

Third point : Humility preserved by the Beatific Vision.

*Evening Preparation.*—The two preceding meditations have shown us the humility of Jesus in its exterior manifestations; we have seen its gentleness and courage. To-morrow and the following days we shall contemplate the humility of the Sacred Heart, and we shall find it profound, even to mystery.

Let us put to ourselves without flinching the

question that was raised at the beginning of these meditations: How could Jesus, Infinite God and perfect man, have a lowly opinion of Himself? Exterior acts of humility might find some explanation to justify them; but the sentiment, persuasion, and vertitude, that constitute true humility, appear inconsistent. O Jesus, make me to understand this to-morrow.

Under the influence of this astounding revelation of humility, shall I not, in my turn, be constrained to become humble? O Jesus, shall I hold my head high when I see Thee lower Thine? Canst Thou have more cause for humility than I? or am I so blind that I can see no reason for humility? or so dull that I cannot draw the right conclusions?

O Jesus, touch my heart when Thou hast convinced my mind. I would that my humility too should be that of the heart, a humility inclining me to self-basement, and even a love for it.

O Jesus, Who dwellest in me by Thy sanctifying grace, and Who dost animate all my actions by Thine actual grace, fill me with Thine own delight in humility.

Make me to love and follow Thee, even into those depths of detachment where self is forgotten, but where Thou and Thy joys alone are to be found.

#### MEDITATION

FIRST PRELUDE.—Composition of place. To represent to myself one of those dark mountains where, at night, Jesus loved to pray under the quiet light of the stars. To see Him, kneeling, His eyes turned to heaven, lost in the contemplation of Him Who is.

Let us with holy respect strive to penetrate the secret of the great temple of His Soul, which in Its humility is filled with adoration and love.

SECOND PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of detachment from self-esteem, in a profound sense of the preponderating part played by God in all my well-doing.

I. *Mystery of the humility of Jesus.*—Let us recall the words of our Master : “ I am meek and humble of heart.” This is the Heart upon which we are about to meditate ; the Heart, from whence arises the desire of humility ; the Heart that has tasted its bitter sweets.

Let us gaze into this sanctuary as into a temple of deep mystery ; we must accustom our eyes to this holy darkness. Actions are seen, but motives are hidden, and motives are the virtue itself. We must beg for the light of the Holy Spirit, and ask Jesus Himself to teach us the secret of His humility.

O Jesus, Heart of love, Thou didst desire love. To touch my heart, to attract and delight it, Thou hast undertaken the greatest sacrifices !

To give Thy life was much, but Thou hast also sacrificed Thine honour. It is, then, the love of our love that makes Thee humble !

O Jesus, wise God, devoted Saviour, Thou hast seen pride to be the greatest evil of humanity, and its most dangerous fault ; to draw us into the way of humility Thou hast deigned to travel along it Thyself, that for very shame we should blush not to follow Thee. It is, then, O Jesus, the duty of example that makes Thee humble !

Slowly I peruse these noble motives ; I meditate upon them with emotion.

Must I not indeed submit, and determine to make

myself humble, that I may help Jesus to save me, prove my love for Him, and be near Him—as near as possible? Yet, my Jesus, in proportion that I realise Thy wisdom, Thy goodness, and Thy perfection, I am the more astonished at Thy humility. Thou hast said, “I am humble of heart,” and Thou art truth; yet humility of heart involves a sense of lowliness, and Thou art so great!

II. *Humility produced in Jesus by a sense of His nothingness.*—We will commence by forming in our minds an enchanting picture of Him. He is the most beautiful of the children of men. His flesh is pure and holy, . . . His mind is free from illusion, . . . His heart is master of all its emotions, . . . His imagination is as beautiful as poetry, . . . His look is ravishing, His words persuasive, His kindness compelling. No stain, no imperfection, disfigures Him. Virtues and gifts in their supreme manifestation adorn Him. He sees on high the angels prostrate before Him, and on earth an obedient creation. He foresees that future generations will kiss the marks of His footsteps, and that in His honour countless beautiful devotions will spring forth.

We will recall all the wondrous attributes that theology discovers in Him: His transformed Soul that exhausts our ideas of grace; His knowledge that extends to all created things; but above all His absolutely infinite dignity, Body and Soul subsisting in the unity of a single person, the Person of the Word: drawn into Its orbit and receiving the same homage of adoration—what transplendent glory!

And in the midst of all this, Jesus is humble! Is it the effect of a miraculous illusion? Not at all. Jesus,

fully conscious of His greatness, realises to a nicety the smallness of His human nature.

What does He see then? He sees that this Divine dignity which He enjoys is only a splendid garment, and that this garment is purely a gift clothing simple nothingness. This soul, thus vested, did not exist yesterday, and at any moment might return again to the void if it were not each moment sustained by the Almighty, for the created being, even of a Man-God, is frail and carries within itself the seeds of dissolution.

We may suppose this adorable Soul saying, long before S. Catherine of Siena: "I am she who is not." Coming from such a quarter, these words almost appal us, and they conjure up before our eyes the imperceptible image of nothingness.

III. *Humility preserved in Jesus by the Beatific Vision.*—We know that we are nothing, and yet we are not humble! Why? Because we do not live in the unceasing realisation of all that our nothingness means.

Pride begins in forgetfulness and breeds illusion; it is never true.

If a saint from heaven came again among us while still enjoying the Beatific Vision, he might by a miracle merit and suffer, but he could never be proud. The sight of God and at the same time of his own nothingness would make pride an impossibility.

Let us consider our Divine Saviour on earth thus enjoying the Beatific Vision, and imbibing from it His profound humility.

What a spectacle this is—the Word face-to-face with the nature He has associated Himself with! The soul of Jesus plunges her astonished and enchanted

gaze into the depths of this Divine ocean, depths that are inaccessible even to her. At all points her gaze is arrested and she is conscious of an infinite Beyond. Throughout the centuries of eternity never will this soul, united to the Word, fully understand the Word.

Though the hosannahs of the crowd surround Him like a brilliant cloud, He does not raise His head. Though His face is spat upon, yet His Heart does not rebel. His thought soars high above these things.

In default of the Beatific Vision, let us endeavour to call up this vision of faith: God infinite and for ever infinite; ourselves, before Him, always and in everything a kind of nothing.

Do we not find this vision in the great souls of the Saints? and do we not meet with it ourselves in certain simple, ignorant souls? How is it that we do not attain to it? for our light is greater than theirs. We *know* our nothingness; but they *see* it, *feel* it, *realise* it.

Let us make ourselves familiar with this view, that it may penetrate our whole moral being. Let us recall it when we place ourselves in the presence of God, and especially when we are at our prayers.

What a sweet manner of preparing ourselves for the Beatific Vision of eternity! Whether it be on earth, or in heaven, whoso sees God becomes humble.

RESOLUTION.—To see God in all our successes, and to see Him so clearly that we forget ourselves.



INSTRUCTIONS ON THE THREE  
SUCCEEDING MEDITATIONS

The humility we considered yesterday is that which is proper for all created beings. It was the disposition of Adam in the terrestrial paradise, and it will be that of our blessed state in heaven; it is the sentiment of the Nothing in the presence of the Infinite.

The humility of abjection belongs to what is ugly and low, it does not befit a being coming from the hands of God. It is made, alas! entirely by the hands of men; it is the work of sin alone.

Let us carefully note this: that all evil, how small soever it may be, is a deformity, and descends lower than simple nothingness. This is clear to the reflective mind, but it is in a very different guise that it is presented to our ideas and tastes.

We certainly do not understand abject humility, nor have we any deep and real conviction of our vileness. Neither do we feel a disposition to put ourselves very low.

Alas! the most guilty souls are the most refractory to such sentiments, and on the other hand we see innocence doubting and despising itself, so true it is that pure eyes alone see clearly. "The pure in heart shall see God," says the Gospel, and they will also see, by contrast, the hideousness of what is opposed to Him—evil.

To see the hideousness of evil in himself, and to judge himself according to this view, especially constitutes the humility of fallen man; but this view is so

much opposed to common opinion that it passes away as soon as we leave our meditations. It is as a dream of the night, of which we retain but a vague and indistinct remembrance. It is a form of words that we repeat without really believing it. Belief, dream, remembrance, all have vanished when temptation comes, and under the stress of real humiliation we find in ourselves only the sentiments of outraged human nature.

What is to be done, O my God, to overcome these persistent illusions? How can I raise myself above these natural sentiments? I seemed to feel the force of the preceding meditations, yet I not only lack the courage to be Christianly humble, but even the simple conviction of its necessity.

In this again Jesus offers Himself to be our Light. He makes Himself the Man of Humiliations, even more, perhaps, than the Man of Sorrows.

He shows Himself so degraded, so vilified, that we gaze in amazement. Before such a spectacle our softened hearts condole with Him, and our trembling hands seek to tear from His head the odious crown of shame. But He Himself exclaims: "Do not do that! These humiliations . . . I deserve them!"

Deign, O Master, to explain this mystery to me.

## FOURTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XVIII

## JESUS CHRIST'S HUMILITY OF ABJECTION

First point : Exterior humiliations.

Second point : Interior humiliations.

Third point : Spiritual humiliations.

*Evening Preparation.*—This meditation is to be a kind of picture of the humiliations of Jesus in His Passion. We will do our best to understand them, and so to enter into them that they will really impress us. As we peruse them we may feel sure that in spite of all our efforts we shall never do more than discern the outer confines of the abyss. The Passion comprehends depths of abasement such as the human mind cannot fathom; it sees what is obvious and is appalled by what it sees, but after a little meditation it begins to realise that it has seen nothing. How would it be if we had the soul of a S. Francis of Assisi, of a S. Catherine of Siena, of a S. Theresa, of a S. John of the Cross? We should find a Jesus humiliated in ways that we never even surmised. With them we should then be ready to trample underfoot all earthly pride, and to tear from our heart the last sensitive fibre of vain esteem.

O Jesus, I have not their sight, nor such a soul as theirs, to see and feel. Thy Holy Spirit alone can bestow them. Beseech Him, my Jesus, to dissipate my false ideas and to do His work in revealing Thee; I desire so deeply to know Thee! Thou needs must be so beautiful: so beautiful in Thy humiliations, for I

realise that there is in Thee a moral beauty so exalted that I cannot grasp it, so enchanting that it casts over humiliation itself a lustre that makes it to be desired !

This meditation does not exactly demand a return upon ourselves ; its aim is rather to set before us, before our mind and heart, a striking picture of Jesus humiliated. May it create sincerity in our reflections, and express itself in the fervency of our love. May our soul be filled with Jesus, and we shall have then done more towards developing our personal humility than if we had anxiously surveyed our own defects ; we shall then love humility with the love that we have for Jesus.

#### MEDITATION

FIRST PRELUDE.—Composition of place. Make a rapid survey of the scenes of the Passion : Gethsemane, that witnessed the Agony, the treason of Judas, and the flight of the Apostles ; the houses of Anna and Caiaphas ; Pilate's Pretorium ; Herod's palace, where injustice and hatred flung themselves in fury upon Jesus ; the hall of the flagellation ; the way to Calvary ; the death on the Cross between two thieves, full in the public eye. A raging torrent seems to bear away its victim into an ocean of humiliations.

SECOND PRELUDE.—To ask the grace of meek and sincere resignation in humiliations.

I. *Exterior humiliations*.—Let us present ourselves before Him Who was “ the scorn of men and the out-cast of the people.” We see Him as a leper, cursed of God, degraded even to the dust.

Let us glance rapidly through all the various kinds of humiliations that would most distress and revolt us.

Jesus was humiliated :

1. In His dignity as a free man.—His enemies throw themselves brutally upon Him, bind Him, and drag Him to prison. We, so jealous of our independence if it is even threatened !

2. In the modest dignity of His Body.—Stripped of His garments, scourged, nailed naked to the Cross in the sight of the people ! An honourable man would prefer a thousand deaths to this shame !

3. In His personal dignity.—Insulted, spat upon, struck ! How do men act under such outrages ?

4. In the dignity of His Mind.—He was looked upon as a fool ; He was given a fool's dress ; He was forced to pass slowly between two rows of gaping people. And we, how troubled we are if any of our qualities are called in question, or any of our opinions ridiculed !

5. In His prophetic dignity.—His eyes were bandaged, and He was struck on the back and head. "Prophesy ! who struck Thee ?"

6. In His royal dignity.—He is clothed again in an old fragment of purple, a reed is placed in His Hand, a Crown of Thorns on His Brow. The soldiers make mock genuflections before Him, laughing rudely while they strike Him with His sham sceptre.

7. In His dignity as God.—His enemies tear from Him everything that is in their power. "He is an impostor," they cry, "for He made Himself the Son of God." On this account the sentence of death is passed upon Him by recognised authority. At Calvary, the Pharisees sneeringly cry, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross." Ah ! when we are wrongly condemned, when we are scoffed

at, how we long for revenge! And if our anger is useless, how our impotent rage consumes us!

8. In His doctrine.—He has come to destroy the law! He deceives the people! He blasphemes! He is the enemy of God!

9. In His reputation.—He is condemned by all the tribunals, Jewish, Herodian, and Roman. He is delivered up to every possible physical torment. Like the greatest criminal, He is crucified publicly in full daylight, between two thieves, and at a time of the year when Jews and strangers crowd into Jerusalem from all parts.

10. In His disciples.—Betrayed by one, denied by their chief, and forsaken by all, Jesus sees even the small section of the community that had hitherto been His adherents lost to Him.

What is left to this humiliated One?

II. *Interior humiliations.*—Let us go farther. Upon the ruins of exterior honour pride can still stand erect and prolong resistance. Routed elsewhere, it will take refuge in its sense of personal worth, as in a citadel as yet unassailed. It is by his moral force that man is greatest. Under the brute strength that oppresses him, he remains unconquered.

Too often, alas! this greatness of soul is unstable because it is made up of pride.

Jesus is set before us in the shame of His apparent weakness. Even before His Passion He appears to be vanquished. Feelings of fear take hold of Him—*Cœpit pavere*, . . . and He breathes them forth as if He cannot suppress them—*Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem!* . . .

He is so overcome that a sweat of blood bursts from

His trembling limbs. . . . He seems so little like Himself that He repulses the long-desired chalice. He is so cast down that He seeks help from His Apostles and accepts it from an angel !

O beautiful and profound humility—in aspect so human, and in intention so compassionate !

III. *Spiritual humiliations*.—There is another kind of pride, more rare but not less pernicious, and this is spiritual pride. Formidable in the midst of approbation, it is no less so in ignominy.

Despised, calumniated, persecuted, we still find, as did Jesus on Calvary, a few sympathetic friends. If our attitude is dignified, if our words bespeak lofty sentiments, and if we manifest a soul superior to misfortune, sympathy becomes admiration. And should God, by some sign of special protection, grant us the aureole of martyrs, admiration is transformed into enthusiasm !

Ah ! what dangers beset the soul that is not very humble ! What a pedestal for its pride !

Jesus chooses unmitigated humiliation. He wills it in all its spiritual nakedness. On the Cross no discourse, but a kind of stupor, broken by occasional words that are like sobs ! No radiance of the soul ; everything in Him is sombre as the night that enfolds Calvary ! His Father is pitiless ; Jesus cries out that He has forsaken Him !

Already abandoned by men, He is now abandoned by God. Nothing, nothing on earth or in heaven, but humiliation !

His abasement is consummated and He dies in it. Oh ! this Crucifix that rears itself everywhere before our eyes, with its bent Head, its livid Face, its dis-



pressing lassitude, is the image of the humiliated Man. It is indeed the very image of humility, even more than that of sorrow. When sorrow ceases, that poor Body suspended to the gibbet remains in humiliation.

Oh ! what an example for us, and what a help !

RESOLUTION.—To kneel to-day three times before a crucifix, asking Jesus to make me understand this humility.

## FIFTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XIX

#### THE NEED FOR ABJECT HUMILITY

First point : Reasons for it.

Second point : Our example.

Third point : Our law.

*Evening Preparation.*—O Jesus, yesterday I surveyed with emotion all the infamies Thou hast suffered, all the distress Thou hast endured ; I saw Thee forsaken by all, despoiled of everything, Thine incredible abasement only too evident. There is no doubt that Thou didst will to be the Man of Humiliations. I see it and feel it. But why hast Thou willed it ? This I have not yet grasped.

Was it only to make Thyself a great example ? No, or then, though I see humiliation, I do not see the humility that can sincerely say : " This is justice ! " Yet in coming into the world Thou didst utter these words ; Thou didst repeat them in Thine abasements, or Thy lowered eyes speak them, Thy troubled brow, Thy trembling limbs ; Thy whole attitude attests the guilty one !

O Jesus, everything in Thee is necessarily sincere, even to the expression of a look, and the simple movement of a muscle. A voice comes forth from all these lamentable things repeating: "It is justice. I deserve it."

O Jesus, wilt Thou not to-day make me understand it?—and understand so truly that I shall never again forget.

If humility is justice for Thee, what is it, then, for me?

This is not a matter of mere sentiment, but of strict reasoning. It is a starting-point upon which depends the whole course of life; abject humility, once recognised as necessary, means a revolution in the whole of my moral nature.

### MEDITATION

FIRST PRELUDE.—Let us set against the picture of accumulated humiliation of yesterday's meditation the moral hideousness of sin. This latter surpasses the former in horror. The cause contains the effect; sin results in these humiliations that are only its just penalty.

To see sin as synonymous with the ignominy of the spitting, the blows, the bleeding nakedness, the infamous death.

SECOND PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to accept humiliation on principle, as a matter of justice and for the love of Jesus.

I. *The reason for it.*—Let us compare carefully two texts of Scripture.

This is the first: *Exinanivit semetipsum formam servi accipiens*—"He took upon Himself the form of

a servant." This is Jesus as we saw Him before His Passion. He made Himself nothing in making Himself man. Had this design been realised in the terrestrial Paradise, among the splendours of original nature, He would still have found Himself face to face with the All and the nothing, the Being Supreme in Himself and the created being; and even then His Incarnation would have been an annihilation, and His humility the sense of His nothingness.

But a second text completes the idea of this virtue by showing it such as was fitting to fallen man. *Humiliavit semetipsum usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis. Humiliavit*—He is like a despised object thrown upon the ground. *Usque ad mortem*—like a guilty man dragged forth to die. *Mortem autem crucis*—an ignominious death, the death of capital punishment, the kind of death that exposes the executed criminal, with his distorted features, his nakedness and his torments, to the gaze of the crowd.

This is no longer the God Incarnate, it is God the Redeemer. It is not the humility of annihilation, it is the humility of abjection. It is no longer neglect, but spite. The origin of this growing virtue is no longer nothingness, but evil.

II. *The Example*.—Let us contemplate Jesus covered with every infamy. He bears the sins of the whole world. *Qui tollit peccata mundi*. He is responsible for it, He is charged with it—*Qui peccata nostra ipse tulit*. Sin is His own thing, He is the personification of it—*Eum pro nobis peccatum fecit*. He is not only charged and clothed with it, He is penetrated and devoured by it; it is a leprosy that

consumes Him. He is an object of horror to God, of disgust to His people—*Ut percussum a Deo et humiliatum.*

Listen to the exclamation of Jesus: *Vermis sum et non homo.* Sound the depth of humiliation in these words—"I am no longer a man, but a worm of the earth"—a worm that is trodden under foot and that hides itself in the depths of the earth. To be humiliated is to be humbled to the ground, but Jesus goes farther. What a picture!

Let us try to understand the secret thoughts of the Saviour.

Every virtue shows itself in its love for its proper object, and consists in a practical inclination tending towards it. Here the object is abasement. The first degree is acceptance, then comes desire, the quest, and finally satisfaction.

It will be extremely profitable to recall to our memory either the words or the circumstances that display these sentiments in our Lord.

Let us in silence contemplate them reigning in His Heart.

III. *The Law.*—Is it really true that this humiliation of Jesus is to be the model for us? Is it really true that in order to be Christians our humility must incline us to judge ourselves worthy of contempt?

Or are we rather to look upon it only as an admirable excess, an unparalleled stimulus calculated at least to constrain us to ordinary humility?

Doubtless such an example is stimulating, but it is something more, something entirely different: it is a law, or rather the revelation of a law and its authentic promulgation.

It is not a question of being satisfied with words and of holding vague sentiments. Let us dig to the roots of this truth.

Under what title did Jesus submit Himself to such abject humiliation? In His capacity as the Man-God? No, but in His capacity as Redeemer, and in that capacity alone.

As our Redeemer, He is our Representative and our Surety. Now the attitude adopted by my representative is exactly what is proper to me, what is incumbent upon me, and is my clear duty.

The price paid by my surety is the extent of my debt. The abject humility of Jesus does not create an obligation, it only exhibits it.

The duty of such humility existed for us sinners, but we did not know it, and without Jesus we should never have known it. He comes, He takes our faults, He knows the humiliation they deserve; and He submits to this humiliation, He wills it, and even loves it.

And when He says to us: "I am humble of heart," it is as if He said: "Be humble, for it is the law, and I have submitted to it for thee. But it is before everything else, thy law; then submit to it also."

O Jesus, what a lesson! and I have never really understood it.

Yet everything pointed to it, well-known phrases, my own observations, the very nature of things; I must have known it, and yet this truth seems to be something quite new. It is because at last I understand it. Oh! I thank Thee for having revealed it to me. Thou hast seen my goodwill, my desires, and above all my needs, and in Thy mercy Thou hast said: "Let My

own abject humility open the eyes of this poor soul at last !”

RESOLUTION.—If humiliation is my law, why am I irritated by it? I will suffer with meekness everything that is painful to my pride.

## SIXTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XX

#### HUMILITY OF ABJECTION—ITS MYSTERIOUS NATURE

First point : It is a kind of mystery.

Second point : This mystery is explained by the mystery of sin.

Third point : Original sin sufficiently explains it.

*Evening Preparation.*—To-morrow’s meditation explains and completes the two preceding ones—or rather, it establishes their conclusions by irrefutable proofs. These proofs, we may remark, result primarily from our faith, and this explains the sort of anxiety that fastens upon our reason, for the reason is afraid of profundities, even of logic, where it cannot follow. In the darkness, even though it is conscious of truth it is not reassured, for it would fain see it clearly, and in its own light.

Our first duty, then, is not to mistrust our reason but its habits. Reason looks upon everything as strange with which it is not familiar; it treats all that is beyond it as imaginary, and disdainfully calls profound doctrine mysticism. What is to be done in this case? We appeal from bad reason to logical and

just reason. Are the dogmas of faith true? Does abject humility result from these dogmas? These principles once demonstrated, their conclusion must be admitted, though such humility may remain a mystery, like other mysteries of the faith.

We believe and affirm, and still we are undecided, so obstinate is nature, so true it is that our will no more than our reason is able to suffice unto itself.

From this disposition proceeds a second duty, that of imploring grace, that Divine help, which will enable us to make the difficult passage from recognised proof to free and entire adhesion.

O my God, establish me at last in the truth, create in me an unshakable conviction! Such a conviction is rarer than we think, and yet even conviction is not virtue, and it is the virtue itself that Thou dost look for in me.

The virtue is a facility that offers to humiliations a gentle welcome! it is the holy habit that peacefully bears the burden, since Thy Will imposes it. In some souls it becomes a love that opens its arms to them, and that sometimes even invites them.

O my God, what need I have of Thy powerful grace! O Jesus, Thy past example does not suffice me; come into me, come Thyself and live it again in me!

#### MEDITATION

FIRST PRELUDE.—To remember that Jesus regarded His Passion and death as lesser evils than the evil of original sin. With Him let us plunge our eyes into the mystery of this sin as into an abyss—an abyss so dark that though the eyes tire with gazing, they distinguish nothing; and so deep that the ear does not



catch the sound of the fall of a stone thrown into it. Jesus possesses what is lacking to us : let us see with His eyes and judge according to His penetrating mind.

SECOND PRELUDE.—Ask the grace to abandon myself to Jesus, that I may follow Him with confidence and love along the way of humility.

I. *There is something mysterious in humility of abjection.*—It is mysterious to the rationalist, who thinks it absurd ; it is so even to us, who, alas ! regard it, at least practically, as a pious excess.

In order to better our ideas, it will be as well not to isolate the Divine Master from the more enlightened among His servants. It is always He, because His mind was in them, but in them He seems nearer to us and more like us.

Let us recall the epithets that the Saints heaped upon themselves : “An abyss of malice,” “An abortion,” “The scum of humanity,” etc.

They considered themselves unworthy to speak, unworthy even to live. Such expressions were familiar to them, and are to be found in the mouths of them all. They are like echoes from Calvary, sounding across more than nineteen centuries ; echoes of the same kind of humility, the only humility that is ever canonised.

Their humility was logical and passed from words into actions. Though despised and persecuted, they were meek ; though betrayed and struck, they bore all with a joyous smile ; when they were called wicked, they declared they were worse ; when forsaken, they were contented. They looked upon themselves as useless, and the good they did they attributed to God,

Who, they said, accomplished His work less with their aid than in spite of them.

This is what they say, this is what they feel, and—we must try to realise it—this is what they truly *think*.

Let us notice more especially those who have been transformed by humiliations; they aspire to contempt as the ambitious aspire to glory; and when God asks them what prize they will choose as the recompense of their travail they answer: "To suffer and be condemned for Thy sake!"

We are confounded before them, for they are men like ourselves, often less guilty and always more deserving.

II. *This humility is explained by the mystery of sin.*—Man would understand the humility of abjection if he were capable of sounding to its depths the abyss of sin. Jesus Christ explored its sombre depths by the double light of His infused knowledge and of the Beatific Vision.

The holiness of the Infinite Being, His majesty, His goodness, His supreme beauty, all the splendour of the Divine attributes inundating His Soul with their brilliant light, showed Him the degree of love, respect, and praise that are due to God.

Then the scene suddenly changes. Sin attacks this Beauty and Splendour, aiming its blows at the Divine Honour as if it would destroy It. At this sight He Who bore the sins of the world is overwhelmed with horror and confusion. Let us contemplate Him in His Agony, weighed down with anguish. Listen to His strangely depressed words: *Transeat a me*—"Let this chalice pass from Me." See the sweat of blood that bears witness to the conflict.

Yet, without hesitation we may say that the holy Humanity of the Saviour Itself did not know all the disorder, all the outrage contained in sin; only His Divine Nature had a full realisation of it.

I am ashamed, O adorable Father, to find that I have measured sin by its exterior appearance, or by the knowledge of it that reason gives! Yet even to the mind of Jesus, sin was, in some sense, a mystery. Ah! I begin to see that I know nothing of humility, and that I shall never know everything!

The mystery is to be found in sin alone, and not in humility, which is only the logical outcome of it. It is, in fact, the state that is proper to the sinner, the just sentence that he ought to pronounce against himself. But how can he pronounce it if he is incapable of estimating the gravity of his fault? He has one resource, and that is to see with eyes more penetrating than his own, to judge, not according to the opinion of men, but by the standards of God. The Saints did this, and this is why the celestial folly of their self-abasement is the highest wisdom. "Learn of Me," once again the Saviour says to us. Why should I seek anywhere else? Humility is a virtue almost wholly supernatural, high as heaven, deep as hell.

How weak and circumscribed reason appears in the presence of this revelation!

III. *Original sin imposes such a humility.*—To clear away the last traces of uncertainty, let us ask the grace to understand how the Saints, who had not committed any serious sin, could yet be abjectly humble. Also, they are not responsible, as Jesus was, for the sins of others.

This is true, but they were tainted with original sin,

and their participation in the fall justifies, even in them, abject humility. We must once more frankly acknowledge it, this is still a mystery that is explained by another mystery.

But the reality of original sin is a defined dogma—that throws the light of faith on the subject that we are considering.

Original sin affects the whole of humanity. It was chiefly on its account that Jesus was Incarnate, that He died, and that He made Himself so humble.

Now every man, even the most just, bears this shameful stain, the object of God's aversion. It is also true that he bears its humiliating effects, even unto death.

Do not our errors, our illusions, our rebellious thoughts, and the evil propensities that trouble the blood and the brain, work like leaven towards all kinds of sin? We are in constant danger. There is not a single sin that man has committed that I may not become capable of committing.

And if such a misfortune has not happened to me, may it not be because the supreme temptation, with all its insidious preparations, has not yet presented itself? Countless examples of unexpected failure prompt this fear and this humility. *Misericordia Domini quia non sumus consumpti*—"Lord, it is by Thy mercy that I am not consumed."

O Jesus, I resist no longer, I believe in Thy humility and in that of the Saints. I blush to think of mine, with its reserves that I now yield up to Thee.

Do I need to understand when Thou dost teach? I do not even need to hear; I have only to contemplate Thee. In Thy exterior humility I have a living

picture that instructs me, and from afar I endeavour to surmise Thine astonishing interior humility.

But as humility is a practical virtue that mingles itself with every sentiment and action, I wish to practise it with great generosity, and without measuring the obligation that binds me.

Perhaps I may thus arrive at a better understanding of the secret of the Saints.

RESOLUTION.—Since the knowledge of sin and that of humility go together, I will make my confessions serve to this double end: a sincere contrition, and humiliating accusations. Have I not been rather careless in this matter?\*

\* Is not abject humility of a nature to throw a man into a sort of terror and trouble that may paralyse him, and diminish in him the sense of personal dignity, that lofty guide of conscience and powerful spring of action?

The answer is simple. Look at the Saints, look at the most humble among them; note their peace, their courage, their good works. Their peace is unshakable, it rests not upon themselves but upon God. Beloved by Him, what should they fear? All inquietude, all sadness, are drowned in His mercy.

Their personal dignity is based not upon natural qualities, which elevate little; but upon gifts of grace, that surpass all created gifts. They are conscious of being the children of God, invested with the highest nobility; and in action they know themselves to be the instruments of the Divine Will.

Compare this consciousness and these lines with those of the ambitious. If there is not enough humility in the piety of to-day, it is because unwittingly it is influenced by the rationalism that is spreading everywhere.

Now rationalism, we must repeat, is not reason, for well-informed reason recognises the duty of admitting supernatural truths.

It is narrow-mindedness that refuses to acknowledge anything outside its own sphere. Many false ideas and much evil arise from this error.

But it may be said, under the burden of such a humility

INSTRUCTIONS ON THE NEXT  
MEDITATION

## I

We are coming to a consideration of that delicate point in humility, the putting of ourselves below others. Several questions arise here. Does this virtue demand this of us? Is it of precept or of counsel? Ought we to carry it to the point of really persuading ourselves that we are the least among men?

Let us begin by recalling several indisputable truths.

First truth.—At the Last Supper, our Lord placed Himself at the feet of every one of the Apostles, even at the feet of Judas; and later He declared that this abasement should be our law. S. Paul recalls this obligation in these words: "Treat others as your superiors." Nothing is clearer from a practical point of view. All the Saints without exception have followed this rule of conduct, and the Church has never canonised a lesser humility.

Thus we see that what we considered as excesses are made legitimate and glorified.

Second truth.—Humility is the sense of our guilty

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it would be impossible to enjoy, to love, to amuse oneself—in short, to live one's life?

Not at all, for what effect has the thought of death, for example, upon us—of death that will inevitably come one day to pluck us from this world, and a death that may suddenly descend upon us at any moment? If we retain it interiorly, as a useful warning, it nevertheless allows us to be calm and busy. Thus it is with the sentiment of humility. (See, farther on, "Of prudence in humility.")

resistance to grace, of our faults, and of our defects. Now this sentiment, when it is real, takes complete possession of the soul, veiling from the eyes the faults and defects of others, and making her sincerely seek the lowest place as that most suitable to her unworthiness. This tendency to self-depreciation has always been regarded as essential to the perfection of this virtue.

Third truth.—An indirect but very strong reason for this law of humility is found in its connection with the law of Christian charity, of which it is the surest safeguard. This throws a wonderful light on the subject, for it appears that charity can only grow in the space made for it by humility.

## II

From these truths it results: (1) That abasement before others really does enter into the exigencies of humility in this sense, that we should despise no one, and should prefer ourselves to no one, in an absolute sense. (2) That beyond this, self-abasement is of counsel only, and has no limits assigned to it except those dictated by prudence.

## III

But is this counsel of abasement at the feet of all men to be a practical rule? Would it be in accordance with good judgment? In other words, in placing myself at the feet of all, must I really believe that it is my rightful place? Certainly, for the Divine Master, the implacable enemy of all hypocrisy, would not ask



us to do anything that would be a contradiction of our inmost feelings.

How can we form such a conviction? and how can it be sincere? This is what we are going to study in to-morrow's meditation.

We may clear the ground by observing that, from now, we must base our estimate of self upon the whole life, and especially upon the manner of its close, for it is this that ranks us.

Now an impenetrable veil conceals the future—our own and that of the very man whom we despise.

This impossibility of preferring ourselves before anyone allows us sincerely to place ourselves beneath all. It is a matter of simple prudence, indeed, but we shall see that humility counsels it.

Coming to closer grips with the question, must we ask if perfect humility exacts that we should, in a numerical sense, consider ourselves the lowest among others? We frankly answer: No. To be the lowest, precisely the lowest, of the multitude of persons who fill the earth, is speculatively improbable, and if each must think himself so, all must be wrong but one! But this detracts nothing, as we shall soon see, from our previous conclusions.

Practical inclination remains, and it is in this that humility consists.

## SEVENTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XXI

## THE NEW COMMANDMENT: TO PLACE OURSELVES AT THE FEET OF ALL

First point : It is humility that Jesus means to teach us here.

Second point : This humility is of the supernatural order.

Third point : Reasons that confirm it.

*Evening Preparation.*—The nature of this meditation, well understood, is such as profoundly to modify our ideas. Though apparently obscure, the reasons for a self-abasing humility are, *au fond*, extremely cogent. Its demands are the demands of a wise God Who knows human nature through and through. Were men dominated by it, an immense peace would possess them, and no duty would be found too hard.

I will begin by allowing to my mind complete freedom to examine the subject. What is conventional and superficial results in nothing solid either in conviction or virtue.

On the other hand, I must beware of prejudice that emanates either from nature, refractory to these ideas, or from human opinion, that is blind in such matters.

I must remember that supernatural truths, once ascertained, become, like intellectual truths, principles, whose consequences must be admitted.

But above all I will pray, I will invoke the heavenly light, and when I am fully convinced once more I will pray that the vital sap of a like humility, permeating

all my sentiments, may give to my charity towards my neighbour the kindliness and charm that are its fruits.

O Mary so humble! O Jesus, utterly humble! Why should I fear to abase myself as low as you?

Sacred waters of humility that flow only into lowly valleys, transform into an oasis the arid sands of my barren pride!

### MEDITATION

“And when supper was done (the devil now having put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him), Jesus riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments; and having taken a towel, girded Himself. After that, He putteth water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. He cometh, therefore, to Simon Peter. And Peter saith to Him: Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said to him: What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. . . .

“Then after He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, being set down again, He said to them: Know you what I have done to you? You call Me Master and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. If, then, I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also. Amen, Amen, I say to you: the servant is not greater than his Lord, neither is the Apostle greater than He that sent him.

“If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them.”

FIRST PRELUDE.—To represent to ourselves the large upper room furnished. Outside, the last rays of daylight rest upon the long draperies of the window. Inside, the torches are gleaming. In the midst stands the table, surrounded by rich divans and prepared for the Pasch. Outside, Jerusalem lies silent.

SECOND PRELUDE.—To ask for a holy self-abasement before everyone.

I. *It is humility that Jesus means to teach us here.*—Everything proves it, the action itself and also the words of the Master.

The meaning of the action.—In every age, men and especially Orientals, have used material representations to impress upon the mind their most important lessons. Now, what action can better express humility than that of washing the feet? The feet! Those lowly members that tread the earth and are soiled by it! But here it is not any kind of humility, but humility with regard to men.

Humility without parade: Jesus does not ask to be helped. Resolute humility: He does violence to S. Peter. Extreme humility: He kneels at the feet of the lowest of men, Judas. Let us study all these significant details.

The intention of the Master.—By this action Jesus intends to give a new form to the relations of Christians with one another, otherwise the solemnity of the lesson would exceed the importance of its object. He calls the attention of the Apostles to it: "You have seen what I have just done." He explains His motive: "I have done it to give you an example." He takes pains to point out the obligation arising from this: "If I, your Lord and Master, etc." He dwells

on the importance of this precept by calling "blessed those who will understand and will do it."

This is no incidental or equivocal lesson; it is a lesson prepared, explained, and attested; it is complete and indisputable.

We must not, however, for a moment imagine that the lesson was to be specifically applied to the actual washing of feet. This would be to convict the infallible guardian of sacred tradition, the Church, of unfaithfulness. The usage, often difficult of practice, has disappeared. It was but a symbol of which humility was the reality, and its immortal, flexible spirit adapting itself to changing customs has not ceased to animate Christian society.

II. *This humility is of the supernatural order.*—What is this humility, that even the chief of the Apostles "cannot understand now, but will understand later"? It is not mere ordinary humility, it is supernatural humility, that the Holy Spirit alone can impart.

Ordinary rational humility is humility before God, than which nothing is more natural. It is also modesty, the curb to our pretensions that human wisdom prescribes. But abasement before our fellows, even before the evil, in fact, before everyone—this attitude of the greatest at the feet of the least, that was the attitude of Jesus—this God alone can teach and impose upon man.

But why should I put myself beneath everyone? and how can I sincerely do so, since everyone should do the same in his turn? Is not this an exaggeration, contrary to good sense, a pious fiction that cannot be put into actual practice?

No, it is not an exaggerated theory, it is the universal teaching of the masters of the spiritual life commencing with S. Paul. "Let each esteem others," he says, "better than themselves."

It is not a mere fiction, it is an essentially Christian inclination. All the Saints have considered themselves the least among men; and if there is one thing that surprises us more than their superlative virtue, it is their profound conviction of their own worthlessness.

The secret of this lesson is to be found in a consideration of our own condition. We must bring to this matter an unbiassed mind, for we are frequently disconcerted by truths that run counter to current opinion.

III. *Reason for this humility.*—In all of us there is both good and evil. The good comes from God, and we have no right to be proud of it as if it were our own. The evil, on the contrary, comes from ourselves and we deserve all the shame of it. Such is our position in the eyes of Divine justice.

Now, in the matter of good and evil, man finds himself in a very different position, according as it is a question of the good and evil that is in himself and the good and evil that he sees in his neighbour.

In his own case he is bound to judge, for he knows himself and his conscience, and he feels himself responsible. He sees the evil that is in him, and he can and ought to admit it.

But when it is a question of his neighbour, he is no longer judge, for he is not competent to be so. Guilt depends on the intention, and of this he is ignorant; ingratitude is in proportion to graces received, and of these he has no knowledge; and the whole sum of

worth depends on the final result, and this he cannot estimate.

Of his own state he is certain, of his neighbour's he can only form conjectures. In his own case it is his duty to judge; in his neighbour's, mark the warning: *Qui judicat fratrem detrahit legi*—"He who judges his brother transgresses the law."

If I have no right to judge others, how can I prefer myself to anyone?

O Divine Master! penetrate my soul with this doctrine, that seems to me so strange; to judge others has hitherto seemed to me as just as to judge myself. Men do it every day; they are in the wrong, and I as much as they.

O Jesus, have pity on my poor reason, that scarcely knows how to assent to such humility. Grant to me the strength of mind to embrace it, and the strength of will to act accordingly.

In others I must see only the good that comes from God. In myself I must see good as a Divine work, and evil as my own.

O wise partiality, that makes life peaceful and its relationships delightful!

O sublime point of view, that mingles in one the two eminent Christian virtues, charity and humility! Humility discovers God in our neighbour, and charity loves Him there.

This is a new precept, and it is not surprising. Since God became man all is changed, everything is made new, and if by His Almighty Will and by a mysterious bond this God incarnate perpetuates Himself in each man, is it astonishing He should command that a supernatural respect be paid to him?



RESOLUTION.—If I have no right to judge anyone, how can I prefer myself to anyone? To repeat this to myself on occasion. To show myself to-day more deferential to everyone.

FOURTH WEEK

DIRECTIONS FOR THE HUMBLE SOUL



## PREPARATION FOR THE FOURTH WEEK

WE are now convinced and resolved we will be humble.

But this impulse needs direction. False ideas, our own mistakes, and ingrained habit, all tend to draw us from the true path. Laws misunderstood and half-digested knowledge may leave us with an incomplete humility, ineffective and even dangerous.

On the other hand, the glory of true humility will show up the imperfections of ours, and by its charm will win our heart. To acquire a taste for good is already to live in accordance with its standards. Desire is the springing shoot, the mounting sap, the effort that tends to growth.

Certain of the following meditations will be concerned with various applications of the sentiment of humility in regard to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. Others will teach the cultivation of this virtue by exterior practice, by inner sentiment, and by that great spiritual flight that is known as the love of contempt.

Lastly, the virtue of prudence must be allowed to teach these impulses its own wise and careful methods of procedure.

This fourth week is, then, especially to be given up to the study of practical humility.

## SOME FALSE FORMS OF HUMILITY

These reflections regarding weak, false, and illusive forms of humility seem less useful for meditation than for reading and self-examination.

They fix our attention chiefly upon ourselves, while the aim of meditation is rather to fix it upon God. Since, however, there may be some who may prefer to make meditations upon them, the various parts have been so arranged as to make this possible.

## I.—RATIONAL HUMILITY

This kind of humility is to be found in almost every soul of ordinary virtue. A little observation will soon show this to be the case. Now, merely rational humility is not the humility of Jesus, nor of the Saints, nor of those souls who are advancing in virtue. Not resting upon faith, it has not the strength to sustain high virtue; it does not soften the heart, nor shed abroad the light of the Divine reflection.

O my God, clear from my mind its narrow prejudices, and reveal the truth to me. I ask it for the sake of the humility of Jesus, that surpasses human reason by the whole height of Calvary.

1. *In what a rational humility consists.*—That we shall not foolishly esteem ourselves, nor despise estimable people; that we shall not undertake what is beyond our strength or capacity; that we shall not exalt ourselves above our deserts, and that we shall be neither arrogant nor vain. This suffices for a merely rational humility. The humility of the Saints is offensive to it, it calls it extraordinary; if it dared it would call it fanatical.

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE HUMBLE SOUL 163

The teaching of the masters of the spiritual life does not find grace in its sight. Its private opinion of it is expressed in such varying phrases as: "We may take or leave it," or "It is absurd."

Rational humility is not always dogmatic, it is often merely practical.

In such a case we are not deceived by reason, it is nature that carries us away.

We are ready nonchalantly to admit every Christian theory on this virtue without dreaming of applying it to ourselves. It is, besides, the most natural thing in the world that we should seek to be seen and to rule.

If a certain need of justifying ourselves arises in our mind, we satisfy it by the most plausible excuses: to take the first place is no more than what is due to our rank; to speak well of ourselves, merely simplicity; and to accept without affectation all that flatters our self-love, only a holy liberty. This is no better than pagan virtue. *Nonne ethnici hoc faciunt?* sadly exclaims the Divine Master.

Such a humility is false in its principles, for, taking no account of the dogmas of faith, it is a mutilation of Christian humility. It is inadequate in its moral import, for it does not attain its end; it is not that humility that maintains peace and charity, it is not such as produces self-abnegation and disperses illusions.

II. *Why a merely rational humility is to be feared.*—Such a seemingly reasonable humility easily deceives us; we are shocked by no excess; nor yet is there anything seriously amiss, none of those moral deformities that betray evil.

Not only our reason but our nature approves it. Of

ourselves we can advance as far as that, and our innate sense of justice and goodness is satisfied.

Human common sense, in accordance with reason and nature, confirms us in a state of mind that excludes doubtful practices. Does not everyone think thus? A victim of the common error, though I have been in good faith, I am none the less utterly lacking in true humility.

III. *The inadequacy of this humility.*—It stops short on the threshold of the supernatural, and through its short-sightedness sees only the human aspect of humility. Now, in order to judge an object truly, we must not content ourselves with seeing only a part of it, however clearly.

The mistake here is not in seeing indistinctly, but in not seeing the whole, and in drawing conclusions as if we had seen the whole.

The dogmas relative to original sin and to our need of grace wonderfully elevate the point of view; to the eye of faith the undreamed-of extent of our dependence is revealed, and in the light of this discovery the inadequacy of a merely rational humility is plainly seen.

Recall the meditations of the second week, and the extraordinary impression they doubtless made upon you.

We have said that all dogma, that is true, becomes a legitimate principle of reasoning, and the conclusions thus arrived at, however unexpected they may be, have the fullest right to enter the domain of virtue.

Nothing, then, is more strictly reasonable than supernatural humility; but reasonable though it may be, it is far from appearing so to us.



We are terribly like those vulgar people who will admit nothing that they cannot understand. Speak to them of disinterestedness, and they will answer you, with a smile on their lips, that *au fond* everyone has, as a motive, some kind of self-interest; that disinterestedness does not exist, and that if by any chance we come across it, it is only trickery.

And these people are very sure of themselves. They are like those rustics who, depending on their own good sense, refuse disdainfully to avail themselves of the most authentic scientific remedies.

In the matter of humility, do not let us trust too much to what it is convenient to call good sense, for it is only of the earth, earthy.

Earth, of the earth, has no capacity to judge the things of heaven. It is that human sense that, in the Pagans, treated as folly the sublime self-annihilation of Calvary, and which, among Christians themselves, stirred up those "enemies of the Cross of Christ," of which S. Paul "could only speak weeping." It is found again, alas! in the rationalistic spirit of to-day.

Who can be sure that he is not tainted with it? Our natural instincts are full of it, and our minds are perhaps not wholly free from it. How many souls, of reputed piety, having lost in a measure the Christian sense, have despoiled the humility of Jesus of its supernatural exigencies! *Evacuerunt crucem Christi!*

Let us seek, then, to see more clearly and to feel more keenly. The day is long in dawning, it is hard to rid ourselves of habit, though it be only a habit of mind, for the mind, too, needs to become accustomed to an idea in order to believe what it has only admitted by force of reasoning.

*Reflections.*—If my humility is not the humility of Jesus, it is too weak to support the supernatural edifice of virtue, and it is powerless in the eyes of God to attract His graces. It possesses neither that profound sweetness that assures peace, nor that special charm that makes it pleasing in the eyes of men. It is no more than an incomplete virtue, dry and unfruitful.

Yet we say that we believe we are humble because we are neither vain, ambitious, arrogant, nor susceptible. Ah! let us return to the school of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, and of Calvary; let us lend a more attentive ear to the Divine Master; and let us take as our ideal not the modesty of the worldly-wise, but the humility of the Saints.

## II.—A NARROW AND PUSILLANIMOUS HUMILITY

Is not the practice of humility likely to become a source of preoccupation? Will it not make me hesitate to take my part, fearful of giving an order, easily disturbed when the necessity arises to act with firmness? Will it not put me under tiresome obligations? Shall I not be liable to be easily scandalised by others?

Humility ought certainly not to cramp our ideas, nor on any account to paralyse our actions and make us timid.

To refuse to practise a virtue or to do a good work that circumstances clearly call for, because it may be an occasion to us of vanity, is the excuse of a narrow and exclusive soul.

To tremble in the presence of difficulties is not humility, but weakness.

Our first regard ought to be for the will of God, our sole rule of action, and we should base our confidence

on the grace that accompanies it. Are we to defend our shy virtue even against God? or rather, can that even be called a virtue that exhibits a selfish fear for its own security and is so narrowing in its influence upon the heart and so paralysing to zeal?

Self-complacence is a vice, but to be sad even to discouragement about oneself is another; it arrests all progress. To see evil in everything we do is neither just nor wise; the good that is in me is not mine but God's.

To be irritated at our faults is to know neither God nor self. True humility stirs us to regret, to prayer, to effort. False humility produces cowardice that has not even energy to arouse us to regret, much less to prayer and combat.

It is especially in the exercise of authority that this narrow spirit makes itself felt in the most deplorable fashion. We dare not give orders, or orders are given timidly, and we do not realise that we are depriving subordinates of a strength that they have a right to expect. We allow them to criticise and find fault without thinking that it is God in the superior that is being held up to scorn; all this is very prejudicial to good.

This sort of defect is the very opposite of the preceding. Rational humility limits the virtue too much; narrow and pusillanimous humility carries it beyond the limits of prudence. This is not such a common fault, and that is easily explained. Rationalistic humility is the action of reason left to itself, while narrow and pusillanimous humility betrays, in addition to a natural defect, an excessive preoccupation with the views of faith.

To discover this eccentricity, and to institute means

of getting rid of it, it is good to analyse the causes that produce it: the one, narrowness, belongs to the disposition of the mind; the other, pusillanimity, depends on the character. Thanks to this distinction, each will know where to set to work at reform.

I. *Narrow humility*.—Like rationalism, narrowness of mind sees humility only in part, but it sees it in its exigencies. It supposes pride where it does not exist, in such and such a principle or act that it believes is infected by it.

We shall deceive ourselves if we think that this defect is only to be found in persons of small intelligence.

Narrowness, as the word indicates, is only a want of expansion. The view is not wide enough, it does not embrace the whole, and it is only this complete view that permits the value of each detail to be seen; on the contrary, some particular point is seized with great clearness and energy, and given undue proportions, and it is not realised as possible that some other virtue, such as charity, for example, may on occasion forbid humility, not to exist, but to appear.

Now the portion of truth that is found even in this error satisfies and gains the assent of the judgment. Then let us extend our view of the truth as far as possible.

The remedy is difficult of application, for it consists of self-doubt, and doubt of that part of the self that we are wont to defend most jealously: our judgment. Yet we must not hesitate, this self-doubt must be aroused, and we may aid it with the reading of books, and by laying open our minds freely to our director.

We shall find that as our minds widen they will become more just.

Education is often the sole cause of the defect of narrowness, and the inculcation of larger views may be a sufficient corrective.

If, however, the long application of narrow principles has developed a kind of mental twist, the cure is more laborious, and will be still more so if the evil has attacked the nature of the mind itself.

How are we to have sufficient judgment to recognise our own false judgment?

II. *Pusillanimous humility*.—We have already seen that pusillanimity belongs not to the mind but to the character, and it consists in a disposition peculiarly accessible to fear.

Fear may arise from an exaggerated circumspection, or from a feeble will. These two defects alike produce hesitancy and instability, though in a different manner. The mind that is over-circumspect foresees numberless possibilities in every decision, and is uncertain how to act; the feeble character would and would not, all the time seeing clearly what it ought to do. Neither the one nor the other can act decidedly, and both are equally liable in the course of action to be deterred from proceeding by the slightest obstacle.

These defects are not peculiar to mediocre souls. Some people are firm in governing others, and yet when it is a matter of themselves they are tortured with fears; they see pride in everything they do and think.

Pusillanimity, then, does not exactly indicate a want of intelligence, but an intelligence of a particular stamp, and it is often allied with extreme subtlety of

mind. A multitude of aspects blinds, and numberless possible solutions confuse.

3. The choice of the remedy depends on the cause that produces the evil. Are you excessively prudent, very particular, even meticulous? Force yourself to quick decisions in ordinary matters. Even in serious matters do not reflect too much, and always make definite decisions. Then, having once decided, do not call the matter into question again, and if you have blundered never give way to self-reproach. Even the most wary do not escape such mistakes of human foresight.

If you are of an irresolute nature, easily put off by difficulties or opposition, beware, for you must not call this defect humility, you are simply giving way to your own weakness.

Stir up your courage, then, and impose upon yourself the duty of safeguarding more carefully your rights and your dignity. Maintain your commands and your observations so long as you are clearly in the right.

A narrow and pusillanimous humility gives to the face, the words, the whole exterior, something constrained and even artificial that makes others feel ill at ease, or leads them to impose. Direction will greatly help and encourage those who find in themselves such defects.

At bottom, narrowness and pusillanimity proceed from preoccupation with self, and forgetfulness of God. These faults are contrary to prudence, whose mission it is to control all the virtues. They also offend against the social order, and bring discredit upon humility.

O my God, I beseech Thee give me that simple and



courageous humility that only looks to Thee, but in looking to Thee feels all the force of duty and all the fearlessness of zeal.

### III. HUMILITY THAT IS FALSE IN EXPRESSION

No one should pass over this subject, for very few entirely escape this defect, and the commoner a defect is the less it is noticed. Without being conscious of it, I may have much to correct in this regard. Yet I do not wish to be either false or artificial in my words or in my exterior. I desire that my humility, if it is not of a very high order, may at least be genuine. Thy light, O my God ! Thy indulgence ! Thy help !

I. *The nature of this defect.*—Man has a certain inveterate tendency to place virtue in exterior actions, while, in reality, these actions are only the manifestation and effects of virtue. He is thus led by the logic of this mistake to content himself with forms of words and vain appearances. The baleful effects of such an idea prove too late the falseness of it. The Jews, in the time of our Lord, had fallen into this error. When they had said to their poor parents, “The gift whatsoever proceedeth from me, shall profit thee,” they believed they had fulfilled the law, not realising that besides due respect this law exacts the love that assists and is not satisfied with a mere form of words. Again, the Pharisees believed they were humble because they prostrated themselves in the streets, while they were entirely convinced of their superiority, and held others in supreme contempt.

Certainly we are not so bad as that ! The teaching of the Gospel has penetrated Christian society too deeply to allow us to fall into such abuses, but we must



take care, for our nature is still human, and human nature never alters essentially, and is prone to indulge its propensities as far as want of reflection and the conventions will allow. Jesus asks us to be humble, then let us say that we are worth nothing, let us exhibit towards our neighbour a gentler attitude and more deferent manners, let us go into church with more humble looks. Look at us, how humble we are! No one, of course, will say this explicitly, but some of us are secretly influenced by such sentiments.

Probe your heart well. When you say that you are worthless, do you really mean it? When you abase yourself, would you permit others to look down on you? Do you not rebel when someone expresses doubt of your capacity, when you are neglected by someone or contradicted?

"There are some people who say that they are nothing, that they are abject, miserable, and imperfect, and yet who cannot bear the least word of disapproval, but complain of it at once; and if you notice some imperfection in them, on no account must you mention it, for they would be offended."

"I do not call humility," once said S. Francis of Sales, "that ceremonious assemblage of words, of gestures, prostrations, reverences, and genuflections, when all is done, as it often is, without any inner sense of real abjection, or of just esteem for others; for all that is only the vain amusement of feeble minds, and ought rather to be named the phantom of humility."

II. *The origin of this defect.*—Every society forms for itself a language, and each member borrows its expressions. Pious people necessarily adopt certain

expressions of humility that in some are perfectly sincere, while in others they are only an echo. This is often harmless enough, since forms of words do not count for much; but at the same time it is prejudicial to humility, since it disparages it, and to piety since it discredits it.

What we say, that let us sincerely strive to feel, for there should be a perfect correspondence between our words and our sentiments.

How beautiful humility is when it is sincere! But if it is ever so little defective in this respect, it loses all its beauty and charm.

This is a great lesson for ordinary virtue. If our humility is not deep enough to inspire us with the lowly sentiments of the Saints—do not let us express such sentiments, let us content ourselves with something less, that has at least the beauty of truth. We are certain to be aware of some defects that we may honestly avow, some inferiorities of which we are convinced, and to experience some wrongs that we can learn to accept with a good grace. Let our humility consist in these things. It may be less profound, but it will be more sincere; it may not inspire us with an extreme sense of abasement, but it will at least deliver us from pretence.

At the same time, we must desire an ever-deepening self-knowledge, and grace to enter more fully into the Divine secrets, so that by contrast our misery may be more clearly revealed to us, and the new sentiments thus aroused may be displayed in our words and attitude with an equal sincerity.

S. Francis of Sales tells us that to speak of self is

as perilous as walking on a tight-rope. We may add that there is one thing more perilous, and that is to speak evil of self. Who, indeed, thinks really badly of self, and is truly anxious to be believed?

Let us leave to those who are really Saints the contemptuous expressions that they heap upon themselves; their humility is sufficiently profound to go so far. Let us only speak of ourselves when it is absolutely necessary, and before doing so let us ask ourselves if duty imposes it.

Let us sum up the various sources of confusion that we have been considering. What petty falsities! what deliberate exaggerations! what secret desires for esteem beneath humiliating confessions!

It is important also to rid our speech of certain phrases which use, and use alone, maintains in certain circles. These expressions shock those who do not believe in their sincerity; and they are apt to be taken up by others who have no real use for them.

III. *The calculations of pride.*—Far more grave is the abuse of these phrases, when, instead of their being a matter of simple custom, they are deliberately used as a means of gaining esteem.

Humility in the service of pride! Could anything be more despicable? Scripture has branded it in these terms: *Est qui nequitur humiliat se, interiora ejus plena sunt dolo*—"There is one that humbleth himself wickedly, and his interior is full of deceit."

While affecting self-effacement, the idea is only to make self more sought after: self is ill spoken of in order that it may be better spoken of; it asks to be hated that it may be praised. It accuses itself of a fault because the fault is well known, exaggerating its evil deeds that they may be overlooked in the sham

humility of the confession, while the less they are believed the more they are insisted upon.

"Such humility," says Rodriguez, "should be called a hooked humility, because it is used to attract praise, as a hook is used to draw towards us objects that are out of reach."

#### V. A HUMILITY THAT IS FALSE EVEN IN SENTIMENT

When we ask ourselves this question: "Is my humility true?" we bring our attention to bear, as we have just done, upon the conformity of word with sentiment.

We seldom push our examination so far that we begin to be doubtful of the truth of the sentiment itself.

There are, however, factitious convictions which yet, astonishing as it may seem, are sincere. Now, though sincere, they are not real, and so consequently are not capable of supporting virtue. Hence the importance of this fresh inquiry.

An impression of humility may be produced by several causes; all, nevertheless, have their origin and common basis in the esteem that this virtue enjoys; esteem is a lustre with which pride loves to adorn itself. In a pious society, the glory that surrounds humility is the most seductive of all, and the more exalted this society may be, the more powerful is the attraction.

In the fifth Meditation of these exercises this influence has been analysed from the point of view of education, but as it is exercised at every period of the spiritual life it is good to ask oneself from time to time if the humility we may have acquired does not rest upon some such influence, and is not therefore artificial.

I. *The influence of prevalent ideas, or artificial humility.* — The society from which we borrow our expressions also influences our thought. Pious people read the lives of the Saints, they feel a great admiration for their heroic virtue; but what strikes them most of all is the miracle of their humility, the extraordinary contrast of self-contempt in the midst of dazzling perfection.

From this arises the desire to imitate them in this virtue. So far good, for the sense of emulation is given to us as the most active agent of progress. But a fatal mistake is made when these souls begin to persuade themselves, while still only little advanced, that they have attained to the humility of the Saints because they so greatly admire it, and to believe themselves called to profess the same self-contempt that the Saints themselves professed.

Their disconsolate accents stirring the emulation of these souls, they ask: "May we not also use such expressions?" An excellent reason occurs to them and reassures them: "Such sentiments are in still better accord with my misery."

Well, let them try, let them repeat that long litany of humiliating confessions; but suppose some friendly person interrupts and asks: "Is this really true? Are you indeed so vile, so abject, so guilty?" Would you believe it? Instantly they feel chilled and surprised, a pin-prick has burst the bubble.\*

Not having the clear insight and special graces of the Saints, they are only a reflection, an echo. Such

\* It must be understood that these remarks do not apply to truly humble souls. We are only studying here suspect humility.

humility is only on the surface, it does not spring from deep conviction. To the Saints God reveals Himself so beautifully and so holily exacting, and yet so amiable, that their own wretchedness frightens and distresses them. On their knees, their faces in the dust, they taste their own degradation. The rending cries of their prayer come from their hearts; in vain they repeat them, in vain they seek still stronger expressions; they never succeed in putting into words the full extent of the worthlessness they are convinced of.

If we have not this intense feeling of humility, let us at least have the humility to recognise it, and do not let us try to disguise by a vain show what is really wanting to us. Let us be content to implore the grace the better to realise our thousand imperfections, which, unconsciously to ourselves, perhaps, fill our lives: defects which, clearly seen by others, remain hidden to our eyes. Let us adopt the wise rule of inclining to condemn ourselves in doubtful cases, but let us not allow our conscience, our reflection of God, the pure expression of our soul, to be dulled and warped by a habit of conventional sentiment. Let there be nothing artificial, but let us be true to ourselves, and above all to God, Who reads our hearts.

II. *The influence of temperament or illusive humility.*—If the influence of environment is felt in our exterior actions, the influence of temperament largely controls us interiorly. If certain surroundings tend to create a superficial humility, there are temperaments that create an illusory humility, and they are those that are dominated by imagination.

An artistic soul frequently dwells in an ideal world outside the actual and real. What she feels and



expresses is the outcome of the influence of the moment. It is so natural to her to play a part that she deceives even herself. As in the preceding cases we have noted, everything is on the surface. Certain poets, cold and dry of heart, have been known to run through the whole gamut of human feeling, and in spite of their appalling egotism have extolled the purest devotion with enthusiasm! Reading their poems, we might exclaim, "What a heart!" and experience regret that we were not acquainted with them.

Their imagination grasps a part, enters into it, and finally becomes identified with it. And it is in the part that they feel and speak and act.

If we ventured to suggest to such men that in practical life neither these sentiments nor this conduct appeared to be theirs, they would turn from us disdainfully and imagine they were not understood. They are sincere, for what imagination has produced they fancy is their own; they have two lives, and they know only one of them.

There are also some imaginary humble people. They admire this virtue and are penetrated with its beauty; they have the love of it, the desire, and perhaps even the inclination for it, but rather in imagination than in reality.

They may go on to speak of it and to exalt its charms; the impression deepens, and soon what they admire and exalt seems to be their own possession. Alas! it is only so in imagination; and it is as factitious as it is ephemeral. It is a dream.

At break of day, that is to say, in contact with reality, everything disappears, and behold! a soul pre-



occupied only with self and full of pride. It was as though there were two persons, and the doubling wrought the illusion. It is not true that man possesses two distinct personalities, as some visionaries declare; he has only two dissimilar modes of being. What he is in the actual is really he, but when he wraps himself up in the ideal he becomes an imaginary being, the victim of himself.

If your imagination is lively and ardent, take care, it may carry into humility, as into everything else, its power of illusion. It only realises itself in dream. Fallen to earth, it soon loses its wings, and, quickly tired if not undeceived, it gives up the task like a coward.

We shall soon see how to discern the true from the false, for the imagination, far from being an enemy in itself, may be a powerful aid, but it is uncertain and calls for control.

III. *The influence of habit or lifeless humility.*—To the influence of environment and that of temperament may be added a third source of illusion: the persistent influence of virtues that have disappeared.

This is found in persons, really proud, who feel the need of making acts of humility, of confessing their weaknesses or their ill-deeds. They put themselves in the lowest place and even accuse themselves of public wrongs; and, surprising thing! they do all this with a kind of conviction.

What is the explanation of this phenomenon? We find it in an observation of S. Francis of Sales. It is spoken, it is true, of charity, but it is perfectly applicable to humility. "What remains of love," he says, "survive in a guilty soul, are not charity, but a bent

and an inclination that a multitude of acts has given to the heart; . . . it is simply an echo that repeats the voice. It has not the sound of a living being, but of a rock, hollow and empty."

Yes, when the proud man shows such severity towards himself, his accent is false; he repeats himself with a forced insistence, and we feel, without knowing why, a sense of uneasiness on hearing his exaggerated and embittered phrases.

A form of words once sincere has been retained. A need once felt persists from mere habit. Such is the nature of this humility, whose power is still so great that sometimes it may even provoke emotion and tears, and is not altogether wanting in sweetness and sincerity.

"Alack!" adds S. Francis of Sales, "is it not pitiable to see a soul flattering itself with the idea that it is holy, living in repose, and finding at the last that its sanctity is counterfeit, its repose lethargy, and its joy mere folly?"

We will close with a remark that should be noted by fervent souls.

A soul that is admired for her humility and knows it, will find fresh delight in making herself humble, and in believing herself so. The greater impression she sees that she produces, the more she will entrench herself in the sentiment of her nothingness. But while she believes she is tasting pure humility, perhaps she is only enjoying the sweetness of universal esteem, and it may be the action of this poison that is prompting her to increased ardour.

*Reflections.*—O my God, I am filled with fear, there are so many possible illusions into which I may fall.

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If I feel an aversion for humility, I am not humble; and if I admire it, I may be no more so.

I make many acts of humility in my meditations; I control myself on occasions when my self-love is wounded; I feel pleasure in speaking ill of myself and the thought of humility sheds a sensible joy on my heart; but am I really humble?

Stay! of these numerous acts in meditation we have nothing to say, except that they are so little difficult to make that they can scarcely be said to bear witness to the virtue.

When we control ourselves on occasions when self-love is wounded, it is no absolute proof that we are actuated by humility; we may be prompted by simple prudence, and at times self-love itself imposes this conduct; the wish not to be considered proud may be our true motive.

As for feeling pleasure in speaking ill of self, and the sensible joy that the thought of humility evokes, we must not make much of such things; in great souls what may be a real delight, in ordinary souls is more often only self-complacence, or a Platonic admiration of the virtue. Wait for positive trials, a slight that nothing can undo, preference shown to others at your expense, a failure for which you are made responsible, confidence withdrawn, or even a well-merited reproach. Ah! if the gust for humility remains, if it welcomes these detractions unostentatiously, if it sheds upon the soul a profound contentment, and gives to the spiritual life an additional fervour, be reassured; such a gust, producing such effects, is a gust without alloy. It does not belong to nature. God alone can inspire it.

It is, doubtless, good to strive for progress ; to carry humility, like all the other virtues, to the utmost limits, but it must be done in all sincerity.

We can never repeat to ourselves often enough the necessity to express only what we feel, to be as true to ourselves as we desire to be to our neighbour. In our prayers, in the elevations of our heart to God, let us be honest enough to deny to ourselves every humble phrase that either the sentiments of the Saints or our own imagination alone suggest.

Such phrases can only produce an illusion of the virtue, and perhaps even pride itself. Being in our mouths empty and vain, they are neither worthy of God nor helpful to ourselves.

Ah ! how good and how beautiful is the true ! It alone is at the same time light and strength, for it alone is virtue.

## A GLANCE AT THE TWO SUCCEEDING MEDITATIONS

Leaving the painful and even saddening consideration of false humility, let us raise our eyes towards the true. Its features will appear to us full of light in the marked tendency to self-effacement, sincere contempt for self, and the inclination to esteem others that it exhibits.

Its direct action will produce peace, fervour, and fruitfulness, triple manifestation of a beautiful health of soul.

It will be an easy study, for it is but a summing up of the results of principles already established ; yet it

will be an instructive study, for at each step we shall discover unexpected beauties; and a useful study, since from it may be built up a practical doctrine; it is also an encouraging study in which all is light, loveliness, and joy.

NOTE.—Those who have the time and inclination may with advantage make three meditations from the matter of the following exercises. On account of their importance certain reflections and affections will be suggested.

## FIRST MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XXII

#### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE HUMILITY

First point : Self-effacement.

Second point : Self-contempt.

Third point : Esteem of others.

*Evening Preparation.*—We shall study to-morrow some of the distinctive features of true humility. Humility is a virtue, and as such should be a permanent force. But upon what point will she bring her efforts to bear? Upon that dangerous tendency that must be controlled : the tendency to overestimate ourselves and to seek to increase the esteem of others for us.

In the first place it opposes to this weakness an inclination to self-effacement; going farther, it creates an attraction for contempt, which, in certain souls, becomes a veritable love.

Is not such a disposition against nature? Not so, for being eminently peaceful and beneficent, it could

only oppose nature in her unruly actions, and its own action is safeguarded by prudence. Prudence, indeed, is the safeguard of all the virtues: she maintains personal dignity, allows all useful initiative, and, indeed, assures that all which ought to be done will be done, humility giving to activity a certain impersonal character, thus allowing God freely to act upon the soul, and preserving the soul in perfect obedience to Him.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace not to be discouraged at the sight of all that humility requires.

I. *Inclination to self-effacement.*—*Ama nesciri*—"Love to be unknown" ("Imitation").

"Humility hides all human virtue and perfection, and will only allow them to appear at the call of charity. Above all, she is simple, and does not wish to appear to know that of which she is ignorant, nor to have the air of not knowing what she knows" (S. Francis of Sales).

She is not fond of praise, though she will not disclaim what she deserves. But she taxes her ingenuity to distract attention from herself, and this is very easy. Speak to others of themselves, and you will quickly be forgotten.

A less humble person will put on a startled air and will deny that she has done anything; this is not true humility. There must be truth and simplicity even, and above all, in the humility of effacement.

When she succeeds, it is to God that she gives the glory; when she fails, it is herself alone that she accuses. Reason expresses surprise, but the humble soul explains it to herself perfectly. Is not God the



first and necessary principle in every good action? Is it possible that the Perfect can have any share in the imperfect?

For the rest, she thinks very little of the good that she does, still less of the praises she receives. She carefully avoids the complacency that pride is ever seeking to instil, for she knows that the least taint of it would be a source of corruption to all the good that God might implant in the soul.

To choose the work that is least seen, the place that is most hidden, appears to her quite natural. She is not ambitious for no distinction, and if she is called to do great things, she undertakes them with simple modesty. In everything she seeks to be forgotten, and as the traveller in the heat she loves the shade and prefers it. She inclines to the lowly and the poor, for she sees Jesus in them. "Whatsoever ye have done unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me." Oh! what a revealer is humility!

*Reflections and sentiments:* (1) An impression of profound and gentle peace. (2) Free and entire conformity to the Divine Will. (3) A readiness to accept, to listen, to love. (4) A simplicity that eliminates all artificiality and makes humility sincere, since the detachment from multiplicity makes God our one aim. (5) Its happy influence on the intelligence of the truths of the faith. (6) Mysterious instinct that reveals the good. (7) A congenial atmosphere in which all the virtues develop. (8) A disposition favourable to the interior life. (9) A heart emptied of self that God fills. (10) The greatest good has always been done by those who efface themselves; God takes them by the hand and accompanies them. (11) To resolve upon this



humility. (12) To compare our lives with these ideals and to make practical resolutions.

II. *An inclination to self-contempt.*—“He who knows himself well, despises himself” (“Imitation”).

A self-effacing humility is such in regard to others; it moderates and directs the innate desire we have for their esteem. The humility that inclines to self-contempt addresses itself to another propensity, the esteem of self, which, unregulated, has a most baneful influence.

Certain natures have great need to cultivate an inclination to self-contempt, for if the desire for the esteem of others is a more general, excessive self-esteem is a much more powerful sentiment.

It makes the truly proud, those who give themselves airs and impose on others, brush aside every, even the most reasonable opposition, disdain advice, and despise their fellows. Without attaining such proportions, pride is still odious and disturbing.

Let us look sincerely into our lives, be honest about our sentiments, and if we discover any trace of this dangerous vice, let us resolutely and courageously strive to acquire self-contempt.

The humble soul applies itself to find out how little she is worth, and to this end dwells upon her inferiorities in talent, in exterior advantages, and even in gifts of grace.

Seeing her defects and evil tendencies, her unstable virtue, she can only blush at the signs of an esteem to which she is obliged to submit. “If they only knew!” she murmurs.

When she chances to commit one of these blunders that are annoying to self-love, she applies herself to

love it, and forbids herself any mitigation of the vexatious impression.

If she commits a fault, she looks at it from two points of view: the fault as it is an offence against God, and in this light she hates it; but as a humiliating exhibition of her own bad instincts and incurable weakness she rejoices in it. Yes, she rejoices in it, for the fault is pardoned, it is no more; but the humiliation remains, and every humiliation is useful, since it helps us to become humble, and calls forth the mercy of God.

Ever distrustful of self, the humble soul willingly asks advice; if prudence permits it, she will even apply to her inferiors, and when success attends her efforts she gladly attributes it to the counsels she has received.

The religious who is truly humble makes the task of monition easy and sweet to her sisters. "Tell me quite frankly all the defects you have noticed in me. Oh! how true that is, and how I thank you! . . . You will see that, thanks to you, I shall end by becoming better." And she feels all this sincerely and joyfully out of love for humility and perfection.

It is in the Confessional that the humble soul gives free rein to her need for humiliations. Certain unworthy motives which make her blush, certain despicable faults of the past, she is pleased to make these known and to recall them. She is careful not to lessen the effect of her confession by exaggeration or by any other easy means; she wishes to appear vile, and not humble even, in the eyes of her Confessor.

We need scarcely say that truth forbids her to attribute to herself wrongs that she has not committed; and wisdom will not allow her to make herself misunderstood under the pretext of humiliating herself.

Certain trials are an especial test of self-contempt. You are found fault with; you are admonished for a mistake or for an imprudence. Stop to think, and if the remarks are just, candidly thank those who made them, and take care that you do not add one of those protestations that betray wounded self-love: "Oh! you are quite right! I have nothing but faults! ah! if you knew all my weakness!"

On the other hand, when you give advice and it is disdained, if you show displeasure, and in a temper say some such words as these, "After all, it is your affair; and besides, you know better than I," you certainly are not acting under the influence of humility. You are making an act of charity a matter of self-interest, while true humility, considering what is for the best, would, in the case of an equal, have gently entreated; or in the case of an inferior of whom she has the charge, have remonstrated firmly but kindly.

*Reflections and sentiments:* (1) Moral beauty of this disposition. (2) Principle of wisdom. (3) A sure safeguard. (4) An incomparable power for good. (5) A well of tenderness. (6) Who would not love such a soul? (7) Who would refuse it confidence? (8) What are the feelings of God towards it? Do we not see Him unceasingly ready to show it His Love. (9) Ah! who will give me to forget myself, to lose myself in sincere self-contempt? (10) A long look at Jesus humiliated. (11) To ask fervently the grace to understand, to desire, to will. (12) To do our best to acquire an habitual disposition to self-contempt, and to keep ourselves free from all vain self-complacence.

III. *The inclination to esteem others.*—"It is great wisdom and perfection to think nothing of ourselves,

and to think always well and highly of others" ("Imitation").

Esteem for our neighbour is not a direct act of humility, but it is the most usual result of it and the most certain proof.

We may be deceived about the love we think we have for self-effacement and contempt; but we may likewise be reassured if we feel a frank inclination to esteem others.

If I have a genuine love of effacement, nothing makes me take umbrage; if I feel a sincere contempt for myself, I extol others the more in comparison.

Pride, on the contrary, exalts self and depreciates others.

*Alios reputa meliores te*—"Esteem others better than yourselves," said S. Paul. Here is our practical rule. The humble soul does not prefer herself to anyone, and never thinks evil of others.

Her own faults occupy her too much to give her time to look for the faults of others. When she comes across them she excuses them; and if she cannot do so, she regards them indulgently.\*

She is even more jealous in this respect over her thoughts than over her words, for they are of the first importance to virtue. She has a particular aversion to that characteristic sign of pride, contempt for others.

If such a sentiment finds its way into her heart, she at once confesses it, and in order to destroy its

\* This does not mean that she approves what is evil or imperfect, and this conduct cannot be applied in cases where judgment is necessary either for the direction of others or in self-defence. To incline to judge others more leniently than self, does not at all imply the desire to imitate their conduct, if this conduct is faulty.

influence she combats the bad impression, forcing herself to replace it with a more formidable one. To this end she fastens her thoughts on the good qualities of the person in question, and remembers the love that Jesus bears towards him.

- In all the relationships of life she preserves a supremely reasonable attitude. Humility inclines her to show herself just, impartial, and generous. She is neither exacting nor peevish. She is not offended by neglect or want of consideration; she is thoroughly sweet and easily grateful, because she sincerely believes that she deserves nothing.

Should she by chance be the object of injustice or even violence, far from giving way to indignation, she begins to examine herself to see if she has given occasion for it, since, remembering her own offences, she acknowledges that God has a perfect right to make use of others to punish her. Again, nothing is more gentle than the humble heart, it seems to have lost the power to be irritated: it feels itself so poor!\*

*Reflections and sentiments:* (1) To admire the Divine ordering of virtues. Charity, being in a sense born of humility, finds under its wings the most effective safeguard, the warmth that makes it generous (2) How easy it is with such a disposition to bear with one's neighbour! (3) The esteem we have for others gives us the power to encourage them, and encouragement is the best means for acting on the will. (4) What would a family, a group of people, be, each member of which was governed by charity founded on

\* This disposition is not opposed to the lawful defence of our rights and our interests; on the contrary, it renders us more firm by the calmness that permits clear sight, and by the benevolence that is ever open to reconciliation.

humility?—no aversions, no bitter reproaches, no jealousies, no disagreeable comparisons, no irritability, no slights. (5) Observe that the esteem of one's neighbour that is born of humility is spontaneous, and arises from a real sense of his worth. That which is exacted by the precept of charity may do the same actions, but by imposing them upon itself. Now, actions that are forced may be just as virtuous, but they are neither so hearty nor so gentle. (6) To conceive a lively desire to esteem everyone, and especially those nearest to me. (7) To examine my conduct in their regard, my attitude, my proceedings, my words. (8) To probe my heart. Shall I find there only benevolence? or am I not rather contrary, difficult, exacting, and discontented? (9) To beg fervently for the humility that disposes to the esteem of others: to ask for it with entreaty.

### A CONSIDERATION OF THE PART PLAYED BY THE WILL AND THE FEELINGS IN HUMILITY

Following those meditations that disturb our habits of mind, let us study seriously the impression they have made upon us.

The chief is a kind of discouragement that almost amounts to fear: "On these terms I am not and I cannot be humble! If I abase myself, I do it reluctantly; if I conceive contempt for myself, it is without much conviction; and I do not feel any cordial esteem for others. Without an inclination for these things, how can I be virtuous?"



Do you desire these dispositions? Assuredly. Well, that is to tend towards them! Cost what it will are you resolved to exercise yourself in them? Most certainly. Why, that is humility of the will, and for many souls it is the only humility possible.

Know that virtue resides in the will alone, and the inclination that forms its essence is an inclination of the will and has nothing to do with feeling.

Gust will perhaps follow long habit, or will result from a very great love; it will become a very powerful aid to action; it will give to virtue a more gentle aspect, but in itself it will never constitute virtue, and virtue may exist, grow, and act without it. Let us make a searching analysis of this distinction between will and feeling. It will not only illumine the present case, but will throw its light upon a great many other problems.

## I

We must not confuse will and sensibility. Will is determination, choice; sensibility may be either gust or disgust. Gust is the pleasing sense of attraction, disgust the unpleasant sense of repulsion.

Sensibility and will obey distinct laws. Sensibility loves what is in accordance with its tastes, the will what is in accordance with duty. It is therefore possible to love and detest the same object at the same time. Thus nature may delight in a gratification of self-love that the will disowns, and may feel disgust in a humiliation that the will fully accepts. In a matter of virtue, to prefer is to love. Virtue, we repeat, resides in the will alone.

It, however, controls our feelings, for its influence is felt in every part of our moral nature. Now the



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more powerful it is, the more it keeps sensibility in check, and in its turn feeling lends to virtue the important co-operation of its gusts and ardours.

### II

Let us here observe that the power of virtue over sensibility is neither a direct nor absolute power.

The will cannot order this capricious faculty to have such or such impressions; but it can present to it in a favourable light the objects that may create them.

This power, having only indirect means, is not reliable in its effects. The wished-for impression may not be produced, a thousand obstacles arising from the disposition, and difficult to analyse, may prevent it. Sensible gust, in fact, depends on temperament, favourable circumstances, novelty, etc., all of them things about which we have no choice.

God also intervenes, sometimes allowing the free play of feeling, sometimes acting Himself. "I will increase thy sensibility," said the Saviour to Blessed Margaret Mary. Our self-love indeed often acquires an unhealthy sensitiveness. A certain humiliation that has seemed supportable up to a point suddenly becomes intolerable.

If temptation should then bring us trouble, disgust, and rebellion, the trial is complete; but virtue may remain intact in the summit of the will.

Courage! God wills. We shall come out of it more detached, firmer, more beloved of God, and, what is of particular interest to us here, more humble.

## SECOND MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XXIII

(OF WHICH THREE MEDITATIONS MAY BE MADE)

## TRUE HUMILITY—ITS EFFECTS

First point : Peace.

Second point : Fervour.

Third point : Fruitfulness

*Evening Preparation.*—A virtue may be known either by certain characteristics or by its effects. Characteristics reveal its essence, effects its action. Interior humility must be true, and equally true the humility that is displayed in action.

How encouraged we may be if we find in our disposition signs of humility, and in our lives some manifestations of its effects ! What a warning if we find characteristics or effects contrary to the virtue !

Peace, fervour, and fruitfulness are the effects of humility. Then humility is the spiritual life in its highest manifestation, a life that is master of itself, that has influence and is wide in its range. The atmosphere is pure, the life vigorous, the harvest rich, the heart enlarges, action becomes easy, and success crowns effort !

O my God, make me to understand and to taste these things, and to draw from them courage and even joy ! If remorse seizes me, and discouragement assails me, at the sight of my life, so cold, so unfruitful, show me that everything may yet be set right, and that, in my unfaithfulness and distressing poverty, I have the strongest reason for making myself humble. It con-

cerns Thy glory, O my God, it concerns Thy reign in souls, O Jesus. If it must be, abase me, break me; I consent, I shall perhaps be like the grain of wheat, that to grow must be hidden in the earth and trodden under foot.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to realise all the good that humility will bring me in its train.

I. *Peace*.—*Invenietis requiem*—"Thou shalt find peace." It is the promise of the Divine Master; it is explicit; it is the special promise to humility. It is in the nature of things. In fact, peace may be defined as the reign of order. *Pax est tranquillitas ordinis* (S. Augustine).

Humility, indeed, brings order into every department of life. It makes us submissive to God, gentle with our neighbour, resigned in our own troubles. From whence, then, can disturbance come?

Peace is the happiness of our exile on earth, as enjoyment will be the happiness of our heavenly home—both are the reign of God.

Peace is the most imperative need of the soul. In order to come nearer to God, we must be pure, it is true, but we must also be in peace.

Pride is a disorder that disturbs us. A wheel out of gear produces trouble. The proud man is wont to complain, of men, of events, of God Himself. He is obstinate, self-willed, and easily irritated. He is ambitious and he vexes himself. Failure depresses him and success does not bring him peace. He seeks himself instead of seeking God, and he is never satisfied. Happy he if, under the blow of some

especially bitter failure, he knows how to bow his head, for in the humble confession of his error he will find peace again.

Humility calms grief and repairs the evil. She puts us again in our rightful place. She gives us back to ourselves and opens to us the Heart of God. What repose in that Heart after so much agitation! What a sense of well-being after so much suffering! *Invenietis requiem.*

There are great humiliations that bring with them an immense peace. They have pierced to the very depths of the soul; but a generous humility was there to welcome them; and their heavenly fire, in which nothing human is mingled, kindles a lofty joy which consumes the victim as a holocaust of incomparable fragrance. It is true that this joy only illumines the heights. That part of the soul that touches the earth sometimes dwells in shadow, for the immolated soul herself needs to remain humble in her own eyes.

"Be desirous, my son," says the "Imitation," "to do the will of another rather than thine own. Choose always to have less rather than more. Seek always the lowest place, and to be beneath everyone. Wish always and pray that the will of God may be wholly fulfilled in thee. Behold, such a man entereth within the borders of peace and rest." Do we not see here that it is Humility that traces the road to peace?

Peace! Am I not sometimes disturbed, sad, discontented with others and with myself?

This condition may be the result of some humiliating experience or the distressing sight of some persistent weakness. Then I had not formed a

sufficiently low conception of myself; I was not prepared to submit to humiliation. I do not find in myself the facility and inclination that belong to the virtue, and how far I am from having love of abjection!

What a sacrifice of self-love do I still need to make to assure myself peace, if I set myself to love all that abases me, whether within or without, to welcome abjection with a gentle friendliness! I admire the peace of great souls under opprobrium, for it is the sign of a strength that is mistress of itself; I envy this moral beauty, but God alone can give it.

II. *Fervour*.—*Humilitas . . . præbet hominem patulem ad suscipiendum influxum divinæ gratiæ*—“Humility makes a man pliant to the action of divine grace” (S. Thomas).

Fervour is not holiness, it is not perfection, it is spiritual activity.

Under its influence the virtues act, help one another, and are developed. Sometimes this exercise is easy, sometimes it costs painful effort. Sometimes spring is here with its charming flowers, and sometimes autumn with its yellowing leaves that allow the ripe fruits to be seen.

But consolation or trial, spring or autumn, there is always the intense movement of life. Now this activity that is the characteristic of fervour depends upon the abundance of graces. It depends upon them to such an extent that without them we are inert, while with a plenitude of graces we run, we fly. Grace is the mounting sap, the circulating blood, the vital warmth that suffuses the whole being.

On the other hand, the distribution of graces rests entirely with God. Now, God is free and intends

to remain free. Correspondence with grace doubtless assures graces, but graces are needed even for this correspondence. What better means of obtaining them than to please Him!—and the soul may please God by its aspect, and may touch Him by its attitude.

Let us study the aspect of the humble soul. It is a mixture of respect, of submission, and of love; a reflection of the profound sense of weakness, an inimitable expression of truth and of simplicity. How should she not be pleasing to God?

Let us consider her attitude. It is that of a poor person who knows his wants and who prays. Her most natural movement is to look up to God on her knees. “The prayer of the humble shall pierce the heavens”—*Oratio humiliantis se nubes penetrabit.*

See how the eyes of the Almighty delight in the sight of this soul, and how His ears are charmed with her prayers. His Heart opens and pours upon her graces as constant as her humble attitude, as powerful as her humble entreaties.

Divinely illuminated and inspired, this soul advances towards perfection and sanctity with a step as rapid as it is sure—perfection that is virtue exercised over a long period, sanctity that is slowly accumulated merit.

Let us cast a glance at the proud soul. It displeases God, closes His Heart, and holds back His mercies.

It does not feel the need of prayer, it prays little or badly, and it languishes like a plant without sunshine. There still remains enough grace to live, but not enough to live intensely. It could not possibly be fervent.

Fervour! I complain of my inner languor, of my dryness in prayer, of my little ardour in face of tiresome duties. I know that, contrary to the law of all life, I do not progress. My vigilance relaxes, my activity slackens, my taste for the things of God is almost non-existent.

How may this falling off be accounted for? Is it not because I lack humility, that disposition that attracts every grace? For in order to have a stimulating humility, it is not enough to rid oneself of foolish vanity and exaggerated pretensions; I dare even say it is not enough not to be proud. Negative humility excludes faults, but it does not arouse fervour. More positive action is necessary; a more suppliant regard, a lively sense of our own lowness, a decided inclination towards what is humble, a cry to God.

Let us seek fervour in the practice of humility, in a quickened and sensible feeling of it; and above all, let us suppress that which saps our strength, the disturbing activity of self-love.

III. *Fruitfulness*.—*Nisi granum frumenti*. . . . If the grain of wheat is cast into the earth and trodden under foot, and assumes all the appearances of death, it is then that it bears fruit abundantly.

This earth that hides, the feet that crush, this appearance of death that destroys, these are the images that speak of humility, this is the condition of spiritual fruitfulness.

Fervour is the effect of grace acting within; fruitfulness is the effect of grace acting without. The one is productive of good in our own souls, the other is productive of good in the soul of our neighbour.

Moreover, they obey similar laws.



Let us see what are the dispositions that God looks for in His helpers. He addresses Himself to the lowly, to men who can only give Him the most meagre co-operation. *Infirma mundi . . . quæ stulta sunt elegit.* To what end? That His action may be the more clearly manifest and striking, and may receive all the glory. A more worthy instrument might appear to make the cause triumphant by its own efforts. It might itself even be vain enough to think that it had done so. The choice of the Apostles and the first Christians is repeated at all times, and when God chooses men of great worth, He makes them still greater in humility, for it is not God's way to ask the proud for his aid, nor, alas! to lend him His!

How many talents remain unfruitful for this reason alone; and on the other hand, what marvellous results attend the labours of a humble S. Francis, of a humble S. Vincent, of a humble woman of the people!

Everything prospers in his hands, and we are surprised. Everything fails in the hands of the proud, and he cannot understand it. "He is much cleverer than such or such another, and has, besides, spent himself unstintingly." But it is written: "It is not he who plants and waters who gives the increase!"—*Neque qui plantat est aliquid*, etc.

To this first cause, the blessing of God, we should add the action of secondary causes. The humble soul distrusts itself, reflects, and asks advice, and these acts constitute prudence.

The proud man follows an opposite course of action. In the first place, he arouses opposition by his inflexibility, or antipathy by his self-sufficiency. God, in order to bring about his punishment, has therefore

only to leave causes themselves to produce their effects.

Sometimes, however, God does good through the instrumentality of the proud, either on account of a mission He has entrusted to him, or in answer to prayers, or for the love of souls who have only this aid within reach.

In the day of judgment, however, His action will be seen none the less clearly, and the foolishness of these intermediaries will be unveiled.

*Insipientia eorum manifesta erit.* Thus the workman throws away a bad instrument as soon as it has served his purpose.

Fruitfulness! How is it that I have so little sanctifying influence on those around me? How is it that opportunities of influencing souls come to me so seldom? So many in the same position as mine seem to make their lives fruitful.

And I have an explanation for it. Their least word has a penetrating charm, the charm of what is impersonal. Their attitude at once disarms resistance; we feel that they are not obtruding themselves; they make us appear always to be doing them favours. Yet they are not depressing, to be near them is to experience an atmosphere of esteem that invites confidence and helps us to become better.

Without humility, cleverness is a chilly thing, and activity a simple human effort. Life alone produces life.

The secret of well-doing is to attract to ourselves God and His grace. Profound humility empties us of self and makes room for Him; suppliant humility attracts Him with an irresistible appeal.

O my God, give me a more than ordinary humility, a lively and sensible humility, the only humility that is fruitful.

Ah! I will humiliate myself incessantly in success as well as in reverses. My one security consists in always recognising that all good comes from Thee, and that I am an unprofitable servant. When Thou seest that I no longer wish to detract from Thy glory, perhaps Thou wilt favour my poor efforts with a fruitfulness that they have never yet known.\*

Peace, fervour, fruitfulness: this is life in order, movement, and expansion, life spreading itself beneath a calm and luminous sky, life bearing eternal fruit on every side, life communicating itself to neighbouring souls, the supernatural life that is the Life of Christ in us, the Life of God both in Christ and in ourselves.

Peace! Oh, give me this peace that nothing can disturb, because I shall be dead to all disturbing influences!

Fervour! Oh, give me this fervour that soars, that runs, that attains Thee, O God, the supreme object of our pursuit!

Fruitfulness! Oh, give me souls, souls born from mine, from my consecrated love, from my action freed from all self-seeking!—the fruitfulness, O my God, that disseminates Thy Life in souls in order to transform them in Thee.

\* God may permit the humble soul to remain unfruitful. Misunderstood in its intentions and in its capacities, set aside or paralysed in its zealous efforts, it accumulates riches of grace that are diffused in other ways. There must be in the Church hidden streams—as there are in the earth silent waters that fertilise the ground far and wide.

O Humility, dispenser of all these gifts, I admire thy beauty and power, I love thy beneficence, I long to obtain thee !

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### EXERCISE XXIV

#### ON HUMILITY IN OUR RELATIONS WITH GOD

First point : The spirit of submission.

Second point : The spirit of religion.

Third point : The spirit of gratitude and generosity.

*Evening Preparation.*—I have seen elsewhere what I am before God. My previous meditations have rendered me conscious of our respective positions; to-morrow I shall set myself more especially to reflect upon the duties that result from them. These duties embrace the whole Christian life. My aim will be not so much to ascertain what they are, as to learn how to impregnate them with humility. Humility will be the light enabling me to comprehend the range of them, the unction that will make me realise their complexities, the admiration that will arouse the generosity of my heart. I wish these views to penetrate my life. I wish the sentiment of humility to accompany every movement of my soul towards God, that it may pass into my obedience and make it thorough, resolute, and sweet: and that, at the same time, it may mingle in all my religious actions, making them worthy of Him Whom we adore on our knees, and preserve in me a keen sense of gratitude and love.

## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace that the influence of humility may so permeate my relations with God, as practically to perfect them.

I. *The spirit of submission.*—*Humilitas præcipue consistit in submissione hominis ad Deum*—"Humility consists, above all, in the submission of man to God" (S. Thomas). Universal submission, covering the whole vast field of wishes and desires. A firm and unhesitating submission, involving that order in everything which is duty. A happy submission, since it makes for well-being and greatness.

Humility extinguishes the will of the creature as an independent determining principle, and substitutes for it the Divine decisions.

The truly humble soul realises the sublime plea: May Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. To it the commandments appear wise and good; and all that is opposed to them abhorrent. Such a soul will not say: "Ah! if such a thing were not forbidden!" Such a soul will not make any distinction in sin; she will not tolerate the least. She willingly embraces the evangelical counsels, admiring them all, and ready to put them into practice at the least impulse from on high.

She listens to the Master speaking within her, and she recognises His word in the peace it bestows. How should she resist His inspirations? She does not forget, however, that the control of her attractions rests with her director, but in him, too, she listens to her God.

Faith tells her that Providence governs the atoms

as well as the stars, and traces out the path of each individual life as well as the destiny of nations; that it extends Its fatherly care of our existence even to the hairs of our head; and that every event, great or small, known or unknown, with all that each event involves, has been foreseen and preordained.

Convinced of these pregnant truths, she cannot murmur; she is meek under every trial, calm in the face of every disappointment. Resignation is natural to her—God has permitted it, God has willed it; God is the Master, and this Master is kind. This is all her philosophy, and it is an admirable philosophy.

Even the most importunate temptations and the most inexplicable interior trials, find her always resigned. She suffers doubtless, she trembles, she fears, but she never asks, Why? nor exclaims, as some souls do who have no humility: "It is not just!"

She recollects her faults, her resistance, her pride. It is the punishment they deserve, and it will be their cure!

Thus she passes through the midst of darkness and trials, confident in spite of them, and ever increasing in humility. Ah! if she could read the eyes of her heavenly Father!

II. *The spirit of piety*.—One of the most remarkable effects of humility is the spirit of piety it evokes, a spirit increasing in strength in proportion to the growth of the virtue. For religious devotion grows with the deepening realisation of the distance between the finite and the Infinite that humility gives. In the light of this realisation, all that concerns God appears in marvellous outlines and colours.

There is a glory over everything, illuminating

nature, gilding the poorest church, glowing in the very name of God. The sight of a plant, an insect, a little bird's nest, fills the humble soul with reverent tenderness. The universe is a mighty temple, in which we should walk with recollection. The voice of humility is ever crying: "See how small you are, and how sublime God is!" What joy to exclaim: "He Who protects my trembling steps is He Who directs the evolution of the whole vast universe."

The humble soul carries this spirit of piety everywhere. S. Francis of Sales, alone in his room, felt himself in the presence of the Divine Master, and bore himself with the same respect as in public.

Let us speak of worship, which is the object of the spirit of piety.

The Church is the palace where the Eternal dwells, the throne in which He receives official homage, the altar where every sacrifice is offered.

It is also the holy place from whence the light of the Divine Word and the unction of the Sacraments stream down, the consecrated place each stone of which deserves veneration.

Faith gives us to understand these things, humility to feel them.

The humble soul, passing over the sacred threshold, sees her ragged condition, and looks upon herself as a beggar coming into the palace of a King. This sense of her poverty exhibits itself in her every movement, in her gait, her choice of a seat, in her modest attitude. She does not permit herself the least liberty of look, the least distraction of thought; such things are not to be suffered there! Here is this poor little creature, compact of nothingness and sin, admitted to intimacy



with Him Who is All-in-All. She is filled with astonishment, she loves, she adores !

Thus everywhere and at all times the humble soul is disposed to treat God as God.

III. *The spirit of gratitude and generosity.*—From the contemplation of our unworthy, poor, and weak selves, to turn our eyes to heaven, contemplating the infinite God, Who in His goodness leans down to this miserable creature in order to raise, to heal, to enrich, and to love it, is surely to give to our gratitude the truest reality and the most powerful stimulus. And this is the work of humility.

Ingratitude frequently arises less from want of heart than from indifference and forgetfulness.

Brought face to face with kindness, man is attracted by it, but it too often passes unnoticed.

Divine benefactions surround us on all sides, daily they are poured out upon us all, and we are so accustomed to enjoy them that we treat them as if they came of themselves, without a directing thought.

Even special blessings do not always arrest our distracted attention. The supernatural intercourse of God with our souls is in some sort continuous. Special graces are not rare, yet alas ! our eyes remain closed.

At times, however, some obvious favour makes us open them, and we exclaim : " How good God is ! " But soon, busy with His gifts, we forget the Giver. We are like little children who allow themselves to be loaded with attentions with the most unconscious egotism.

Now, nothing makes us so aware of God's benefits, nothing so arouses gratitude, as the spirit of humility. I have deserved to be abandoned, and I am the object

of the most attentive solicitude! I have deserved hatred, and I am the object of love! This contrast may be indefinitely amplified, it covers the whole extent of our misery and the whole vast field of God's mercies.

It recalls that beautiful canticle of the Psalms, which at each verse repeats: *Quoniam in æternum misericordia ejus!*—I shall indeed need eternity to sing of all Thy mercies!

The truly humble soul is not afraid to look at the gifts of God in herself, and the magnificat which escapes her lips proceeds from two points of view that harmonise and complete each other.

The sight of what is good in ourselves is only dangerous when it remains isolated from its counterpart; it is most useful when united with the realisation of God's goodness as the only source of ours.

The important thing, then, is that we should keep in view the whole truth.

Shallowness, self-complacence, and above all praise, may insidiously draw the soul away from this complete view—and they are in this respect its worst enemies.

## FOURTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XXV

#### ON HUMILITY IN OUR RELATIONS WITH OUR NEIGHBOUR

First point : Towards superiors.

Second point : Towards equals.

Third point : Towards inferiors.

*Evening Preparation.*—There is doubtless a humility of a higher nature than that we must show to our neighbour, for this has its limits.

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On the other hand, there is no more virtuous humility when it costs something, as it usually does, and is active in face of interior rebellion and distaste. It is the most powerful support of our other virtues, for only a humble soul is always gentle and patient, entirely just and reasonable, and it alone can soften the heart, ours as well as our brother's.

All hardness, all want of consideration, all egotism, show that humility is lacking.

God has given us a sign by which we may know whether we love it: it is love towards those who would naturally inspire us with indifference or aversion. This love is synonymous with humility. It is easy to humble ourselves before God, provided that we have the faith; but to be humble towards our neighbour, whoever he may be, is almost heroic. By this touchstone we may recognise the true virtue of humility.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to understand these duties in their full perfection, and to make special resolutions accordingly, since this meditation is of an extremely practical character.

I. *Towards superiors.*—If we are truly humble with God, we shall be so with our superiors, for we shall see and shall respect in them the imprint of the Divine Majesty. Their sacred character as the representatives of God will so transform them in our eyes that we shall not notice their individual imperfections; we shall not allow our thoughts to dwell on the defects that make their superiority burdensome and even intolerable to us, according to human views; our whole

bearing towards them will be invested with the spirit of interior and filial submission.

II. *Towards our equals.*—The soul that lives in a constant recollection of the greatness of God and of her own insignificance will place herself on a footing of equality with all; to her, her equals will always be in some ways her superiors, and from the bottom of her heart she will honour their relative superiority.

She has a wonderful instinct in discovering the natural and spiritual advantages of her equals, and before these she is content to bow; their talents, merits, and qualities are so many titles to her respect, and authorise her in effacing herself.

She loves to take the lowest place among her equals, and is never wanting in good reasons for possessing herself of it. Very far from entering into rivalry with anyone, she is always disposed to give way, to defer to others, falling in with their judgment, their tastes, and their wishes.

Would to God that everyone was animated by this spirit in their human relationships.

What perfect unity, what delicate charity would reign among men if they realised the wish of S. Paul:

*In humilitate superiores sibi invicem arbitantes!*—

“Let each esteem others better than themselves.”

III. *Towards inferiors.*—He who sees himself in a true light will not attribute to himself any superiority over others; in this sense he considers that he has no inferiors.

“Think not that thou hast made any progress unless thou feelest thyself lower than all,” says the author of the “Imitation.”

If he must exercise authority on God’s behalf, the

humble man will not lose sight of his own nothingness; he will not forget it for a moment.

By his solicitude, his devotion, and his gentleness, he will make himself the servant of all.

When he renders to them the services of his office, he fulfils with joy the least exalted functions; he abases himself interiorly before them, he kneels in spirit at their feet after the example of the Divine Master, Who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. There is nothing imperious nor hard, nothing exacting, in his manner of issuing his commands. "He that will be first among you shall be your servant."

He puts himself in the place of his subordinates in order that he may understand their difficulties and trials, and know how to meet and allay them. He seeks to obtain a spontaneous obedience by asking it in the name of the good God.

He never publicly reproves them, nor does so in private in such a way as to offend their susceptibilities. He seeks to prevail over the untractable by an invincible patience.

Oh! if we were truly humble, what a power we should have over souls! Greatness may inspire fear, talents admiration; but simplicity and modesty set others at their ease; attract and subjugate them, for they cannot help recognising the living likeness to Him Who was meekness and humility incarnate.

NOTE.—During the fifth week we shall consider the love of our neighbours from a much wider point of view.

## FIFTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XXVI

## ON THE CULTIVATION OF EXTERIOR HUMILITY

First point : To enclose ourselves in humility.

Second point : To saturate ourselves in humility.

Third point : To exhale humility.

*Evening Preparation.*—"Exterior acts of humility," said S. Francis of Sales, "are not humility, but they are very useful: they are the rind of the virtue, preserving the fruit."

Superficial minds do not sufficiently take into account the influence that the physical exercises over the moral; humility may find in the exterior practices prompted by her a reflex influence that aids her development.

It appears that things enter into us by the senses, and leave behind them their own peculiar impression. Up to now I may have passed disdainfully over this kind of formative influence.

It is, however, the most useful and not less powerful aid that is within my reach. The ship's rudder, though insignificant in size, is nevertheless master of the course. A humble attitude steadily maintained may take us very far along the course of virtue.

Besides this, if there is real interior humility, an exterior that is not humble is in contradiction to it—or rather, that virtue is suspect that does not exhibit its influence in all the natural exterior functions. Every living principle creates harmony.

## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to accustom myself to the frequent use of some special practice.

I. *To enclose ourselves in humility.*—Poor apartments, especially those that are our own. Modest dress, as modest as possible. For our society the less wealthy for preference, the less highly placed, etc.

A poor apartment, under garments very poor and very much repaired, etc., all such marks of indigency, impress us and incline us to humility. A rich apartment, relatively costly clothing, have the contrary effect.

These effects are produced of themselves, and they are irresistible. An action good or bad depends on our will, but our impressions depend on things.

It is wise, then, to surround ourselves with everything that will preserve in us impressions of humility. All that produces this result may be used to the same end. We should be careful to let our eyes rest upon what is poor around us, to love it, to make ourselves happy in it, to repeat to ourselves that that is exactly what suits us, that we do not deserve as much. Let us often take upon our lips these words: O God, cause the humility of these things to enter into my heart.

II. *To saturate ourselves with humility.*—Having settled its choice on the objects that surround us, this virtue becomes ambitious to go farther. Our exterior will be its next conquest; it receives its law, takes its impress, and becomes impregnated with its gentle influence. In its turn it will pay its tribute to interior humility by still further increasing it.

It is, in fact, the application of the principle of co-



relation between the physical and moral. A prudent restraint that moderates quickness of movement and ease of position, the domineering voice and freedom of look, communicates to the soul the sentiment of humility. Since it acts under its orders, such restraint is even a positive act of the virtue, and to render its influence more powerful we may explicitly say to ourselves: "I have no right to give myself so much liberty." The force of exercise is then added to that of impression.

A really humble person has very definite characteristics, a mixture of candour, deference, and amiability. There is no affectation; his pose, gait, tone of voice, look, are all stamped with humility; and the face sums up in its expression this harmonious whole.

A face that has become gentle and humble is such a help to us, it is an edification to others, and a great power in our action upon souls.

The reflection of humility instinctively attracts.

Oh! could I thus saturate myself with humility! Would that I might become unable to do a single external action that did not exhale a perfume from within!

III. *To exhale humility.*—A garment impregnated with a perfume sheds it all around; a humility that fills the heart and is reflected in the exterior is exhaled by every gesture, every action, every word. This virtue passes from the heart where it dwells to the exterior that it governs, showing itself there and radiating forth a beautiful light and warmth.

Look at this humble person. She speaks to others, even to the least, with tokens of a respect that she never departs from, and should she change her manner

and make it less deferential, it is only from wise and charitable motives.

It seems natural to her to choose whatever is least, to regulate her steps to others, to allow them to lead the conversation, to appear contented with everything and everyone. Not speaking of herself, effacing herself as much as possible, she will not be brilliant in society, and yet it is a strange fact that she will diffuse an ineffable charm.

In her presence we breathe a perfume so real that we scarcely notice it, yet so strong that we are penetrated by it. God often permits that those who have enjoyed it do not dream of the little hidden violet that has given it, and she suspects it least of all.

But how virtue grows by these abasements! She hides herself, and that is much; she makes a holy exercise of it and it grows; each time respect is shown, each time silence is kept, each time disputes are avoided, the force of habit has increased, and the satisfaction of God is augmented.

O Lord, pride too often breathes in my words, my eagerness, my want of consideration, my arguments, my desire to appear, and, alas! even in my sadness.

O Jesus, so meek and so amiable by virtue of Thy humility, give me that which I can never give myself.

RESOLUTION.—O my God, I desire that everything in me may help me to become humble. I desire that everything in me shall prove it to Thee—everything, even the tone of my voice and the slightest smile.

## SIXTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XXVII

## ON THE LOVE OF CONTEMPT

First point : The nature of this sentiment.

Second point : Its motives.

Third point : Its cultivation.

Fourth point : Its justification.

*Evening Preparation.*—Shall I undertake this meditation that seems so little meant for me? To raise myself to the love of contempt—I, who do not know how to accept inevitable trials! To exclaim in face of humiliation that it is good; and in some sort even to thank those by whom it comes? To choose it in preference when it is wise to do so? Why! this would be a world turned upside down, and nothing short of a miracle could thus transform me!

Yet, my Jesus, in Thy humiliations, perhaps Thou dost call me to share Thy bitterness and honour! Have I not told Thee a thousand times that I wish to be near Thee, as near as possible? Have I not asked Thee to give me a heart like Thine? Shall I allow Thee to bear alone those degradations that Thou hast taken upon Thyself for my sake?

At least I cannot refuse to direct my thoughts thither. The contemplation of Thy profound humility will doubtless arouse in me some aspirations. There is no greater stimulus than beauty, it stirs our noblest feelings, and some souls there are who remain at a standstill in the way of humility, until one day the Ideal is revealed to them.

The considerations that follow are of an educative character. They pertain to the category of counsels, and set before us heights that our feet will never attain; but even so, they cannot fail to influence us profoundly.

Some ideas will spring from them, some aspirations arise, some efforts be inaugurated, and our consciousness of their truth will powerfully tend to the elevation of our practical life.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask grace to detach myself from human points of view; to admire what I cannot attain, and at least to conceive a sincere desire of it.

I. *The nature of this sentiment.*—Sincere self-contempt already takes us far upon the road of humility, but, of itself, it will not take us all the way.

It certainly supposes very exalted views of faith and a courageous logic, but its effect is limited by the fact that we remain the sole spectators of our unworthiness, and the confession of our lips falls only upon our own ears!

The love of contempt goes much farther, for it desires contempt in broad daylight, contempt that may be read on the faces of others. It is no longer only in our own sight that we are abased.

We pass from the region of vague ideas to positive fact. An idea is like the cloud that floats peacefully in high heaven; fact is the storm that breaks over us and buffets us.

Self-contempt affects only one of the two propensities that are the bases of our pride: self-esteem; the love of contempt immolates besides the strong desire

we have for the esteem of others. There are two enemies to fight, two wounds to suffer at the same time.

Since this strange love is the supreme act of humility it is naturally its most certain proof. In vain we plunge ourselves in self-contempt, we cannot be sure of a perfect humility until we are faced with the contempt of others. This alone sets all our pride on edge, all our nerves tingling, and in order to love such a trial humility must, so to speak, have passed into our very blood.

If we rebel, if in spite of our acceptance, our temper breaks out, we may conclude, not that we have no humility, but that it is still imperfect; the virtuous inclination is not sufficiently deeply rooted in our nature to transform its impressions; but it is sufficiently master of the will to conquer them, and if it is sincere at least to disown them. A certain disturbance is inseparable from this as yet imperfect state.

If, on the other hand, humiliation arouses nothing violent in nature, then nature is subdued. Humility has firmly established its dominion, and under this dominion an imperturbable peace reigns.

If this peace is accompanied by inner sweetness and utters itself in accents of joy, the virtue is perfect. It goes out to meet humiliation; it embraces it as a friend; it is pleased with the abasements it brings, transforming their bitterness by love. Such effects betoken complete abandonment to the virtue; the whole soul belongs to it even in its unplumbed depths of sensibility, even in those instinctive movements that only obey long habit.

Certain authors discern two degrees in this humility. The first the desire for contempt, and the second

the full acceptance of it. In this they confuse degree and priority; naturally the desire must come first, and the act follows; but the desire may be as perfect as the act. The act has the advantage of being the proof, but the proof of a sentiment is not its measure.

This measure is only to be found in stability of habit, in intensity of desire, and lastly, in elevation of sentiment.

Be reassured, then, holy souls who are spared actual humiliations; it still remains to you to desire them. In this way you may attain the loftiest heights. Envy, if you will, the victims who give their God this external sign of their complete abnegation, who show Him this speaking likeness to His Son; but recollect that God reads hearts, and that in His eyes, desires are true actions, as real, as beautiful, as meritorious, and as transforming as external ones, and that they have indeed the advantage of being able to be more numerous. The interior world is so vast, the life that animates it so intense, the prodigies that fill it are so astounding! It is the secret garden where God takes His pleasure; it is a blossoming spring where every colour is displayed and every perfume reserved for Him alone.

O you who understand and feel these things, turn your hopes towards desire, the wonderful creative power, and make it the principle of an interior life whose activity is ever on the increase.

In the order of virtue, as we have just seen, act and desire are identical, but if desire has the advantage of being able to repeat itself more frequently, acts have on their side that of provoking a more vigorous

reaction. External humiliation touches our senses and obtrudes itself violently upon our soul. Against such an assault virtue needs to call up all its forces, and the very intensity of the battle provoked leads to a more perfect and decisive victory.

II. *Motives for this sentiment.*—The love of contempt is the result of a clear perception of our weakness, and also of a sad recollection of our faults. A sense of the truth awakens a sense of what is just.

“I am contemptible; I deserve contempt; I ought to love contempt.”

Great sincerity and nobility of soul may give rise to this disposition. It is often accompanied by the ambition to reinstate ourselves and to make reparation. “Humiliation will be my redeeming pledge, and I desire it with all my heart!”

The love of contempt, however, seldom originates entirely from such a disposition. It is often born of Divine love, and indeed without great love such rigour against self is scarcely conceivable.

Divine love tends to self-humiliation, for love cannot take its share in having wounded God without keen suffering for having done so, and an avenging humility becomes a solace to it; love admires the Divine beauty, and in face of its splendour blushes at the sight of its own meanness, and would fain fly and hide itself. Humiliation then serves it as a refuge.

From its lowly place it sees Divine greatness uniting Itself with its insignificance and allowing Itself to be loved by it!

Without being strangers to such sentiments, the greater number of the faithful arrive at a love of contempt by a simple love of the Divine Saviour.



Let a loving soul attach herself to His footsteps; let her give herself to Him to follow Him whithersoever He goes; let her love Him so much that she cannot allow Him to suffer a single humiliation alone; let her desire to take His place, and be ready to bear everything to spare Him an affront or to console Him for it; and she will display a humility that excels itself, borrowing from friendship its nobility, its warmth, its ingenuity in love, its fidelity unto death, and its triumphant dominion.

Jesus suffers humiliation and I embrace it. Like Him I desire it, with Him I delight in it. The silence I keep and that condemns me, He kept; the ingratitude that forsakes me, He too suffered, even to betrayal.

O sweet thought! When Jesus, just before facing the worst outrages, called to His aid the prayers of the Apostles and the succour of the angels, He foresaw a wonderful train of consoling spirits hurrying to Him from afar. I was one of them, my Jesus, offering to Thy dry lips the comforting chalice of my own humiliations beloved for Thy sake, and in Thine agony of thirst Thou didst deign to drink it, sending me across the distant years a "Thank you" from Thy pallid lips.

Then, shall I not welcome these humiliations, shall I not long for those blessed opportunities of being present at Calvary?

They are indeed Thine, O Jesus, these humiliations of my poor life, since they are offered to Thee and Thou hast accepted them; but they are Thine for a more intimate reason.

The resignation that welcomes them, the desire that invites them, arise from dispositions not created by

nature but by grace, and grace is wholly Thine action, O Jesus. When I love an abasement, a slight, it is Thou Who lovest it in me. I lend Thee my will and my heart, and Thou dost use them as on earth Thou didst use Thine own Will and Heart. What Thou didst when on earth, Thou dost continue to do by Thy Divine power in me. What can be more Divine than this gracious mingling of our two lives?

What, then, should not be my joy in enriching Thee with humiliations that Thou dost not suffer, and in seeing myself, an insignificant being, honoured to the point of prolonging and increasing Thy life?

In the radiance of these revelations contempt is so transformed, and appears so beautiful, that my whole heart turns towards it with delight and longing.

O Holy Spirit, grant me, I beseech Thee, a perfect knowledge of these things; fill me with a love that opens its arms to them, and so unite me to Thyself, O Jesus despised, that I may be filled with the thoughts that inspired Thy life and that at this time Thou hast come to bring me.

III. *Cultivation of this sentiment.*—Oh! you who do not understand such sentiments, remember that they are supernatural, out of our reach, and only taught by God. We praise Thee, O Father, that Thou hast revealed them to the poor and humble, and hast hidden them from the proud who trust in their own lights!

In the measure of our grace let us make ourselves small and humble before God, small and humble before those about us, for these are the first steps to the heights.

And you, timid souls, who admire these noble

dispositions without aspiring to them, say not, "It is too high and too difficult." Too high for your actual stature, it is true; but you have not yet attained your full height. Too difficult for your present powers, that is also true; but you must know that with exercise our powers develop in a marvellous way, and that the action of God, united with ours, eliminates impossibility.

Will you give in to the natural cowardice that believes admiration of virtue is enough? It is not enough. Admiration should inspire and awaken desire in us, and give us ardour in the pursuit of the ideal that is set before us.

If now you behold a glimmer of dawn in the heavens set out in certain hope, graduate your steps; commence by accepting with a more loving heart the humiliations that you cannot escape, do not seek extreme means to spare yourself from them; put away all defiance; force yourself sometimes to say "Thank You" to God; be gentle towards those who have humiliated you, and at least pray for them.

In the measure that we raise ourselves, we enter a more luminous region; the mystery of humiliation begins to yield up some of its secrets, an invisible and Almighty Hand helps us to surmount obstacles, and in fatherly fashion raises us when we fall.

To ask for humiliations is not contrary to self-distrust. The love that is ambitious to follow Jesus so far counts wholly upon His grace. On the other hand, not to ask but to await humiliation with secret desire is perhaps as perfect, when the delicacy of a great love prompts us to leave to Jesus the care of dispensing it at His own good pleasure. All the generosity of the

soul seems, then, to gather itself up in readiness for the first signal. This is the filial attention that S. Francis of Sales speaks of as being most worthy of praise.

IV. *Justification of this sentiment.*—An objection is here presented, but more expressly, that has already been raised, and can be soon disposed of. Is not such a sentiment contrary to all our personal instincts, to the universal feeling of mankind, and even to reason itself? Contrary to our instincts? Obviously so. To the feelings of men? It is true. To reason? Well, yes again, if reason is left to its own resources.

Reason is restricted, its natural range is extremely limited, but the dogmas of faith extend it infinitely.

In their larger light reason, better informed, draws new conclusions.

Now these new conclusions create a new ideal entirely foreign to human nature. Christian humility, by its essential exigencies, is already a supernatural virtue; but it becomes an eminent virtue in the supernatural order when it urges us to the love of contempt. And though such a love is only of counsel, it alone establishes us in that perfect state which allows God, our first principle, full liberty of action in our souls.

RESOLUTION.—To humiliate ourselves, seeing ourselves so far from such perfection. To make an offering of ourselves. To seek by greater love to understand and to experience.

REMARKS ON THE LOVE OF OUR OWN  
ABJECTION

S. Francis of Sales has treated of this subject with his usual wisdom, and we should be satisfied to go back to his luminous pages if we had not so often been confronted with this question : “ Well, what are we to understand by our own abjection ? ”

All that we can do here is to set forth the doctrine of the great Saint in a more strictly methodical manner.

I. At the outset we may ask, “ What is meant by an abjection ? ” An abjection is anything that humiliates us either in our own eyes or in the eyes of others ; our inferiorities of every sort, of fortune, of position, of knowledge, of virtue ; our defects, especially those that are most apparent ; our discovered blunders ; our public failures. Among more interior things, our degrading temptations, our cowardly concessions, our faults, and above all our relapses.

Exterior abjection, observe, is less in fact than in opinion. A thing is only humiliating because it is judged to be so, and according to the circumstances the same action may be either our glory or our shame.

“ Look,” said S. Francis of Sales, “ at that good and devoted Capuchin, all in rags and starved with cold. Everyone honours his torn habit, and has compassion on his suffering ; but if a poor artisan or a poor young girl appears in this state, they are despised, mocked at, and the same poverty in them is considered abject. A religious receives in silence a sharp reproof from a superior, or a child from its father, and this is called

obedience and goodness; but if a person in the world suffers as much from someone for the love of God, it is called mean-spirited and cowardly. One man has a cancer on his arm, and another on his face. The one hides it and has only the evil; but the other cannot hide it, and has scorn and humiliation with the evil."

There are abject virtues and honourable virtues. Patience, gentleness, simplicity, humility, are virtues that are considered base and abject in the eyes of the world, while *savoir-faire*, generosity, and liberality are highly esteemed. Again, in the practice of the same virtue, some acts are despised and others honoured. To give alms and to pardon our enemies are two acts of charity—there is no one who does not praise the first, while the second is almost universally disdained.

Certain accidents cover us with shame. "We fall in the street, and besides the injury we may receive we also have the embarrassment of having fallen."

"It is the same with faults that are followed by no other effects than the sole one of humiliation. Humility does not require us to commit such faults purposely, but when we have committed them, she asks us not to disquiet ourselves. Such faults are certain impolitenesses, inadvertences, and other like blunders. Prudence and civility, indeed, demand that we should refrain from them as far as possible; but when they have escaped us, holy humility desires us to accept all the abjection of them. I will say even more: if I have allowed myself, in anger or from any other motive, to say unkind or inconvenient words, I shall at once reproach myself roundly; I shall be truly penitent, and shall do my utmost to repair the fault; but at the same time I will accept the abjection that it may bring upon



me, and if it is possible to separate one from the other, I will regret the sin most bitterly, but I will keep the abjection of it in my heart and bear it with humble patience."

II. What is the love of abjection? Abjection certainly cannot be loved for its own sake. "This would be meanness of spirit or cowardliness of heart." It is the love of abjection as a just and good thing.

Humility alone can show it to us in this light, because she drives out the prejudices of pride; she alone gives the inclination towards what justly abases us, because she is virtue.

"Humility is a true knowledge of our abject condition, and the disposition that leads us to acknowledge it. Now, perfect humility consists not only in recognising our state, but in loving it and in delighting ourselves in it, in view of the glory we owe to God and the esteem we should feel for our neighbour over ourselves" (S. Francis of Sales).

III. Why does humility show a particular affection for the abjection that arises from circumstances? For this lofty and little-considered reason: that we enter thus into God's plan, that good and wise plan that is preferable to one of our own choice. This is not the judgment of men, who reserve their esteem for humiliations that are self-imposed. The mistake arises from the fact that in these we see more ostensibly the generosity that seeks them. We do not realise that an equal generosity is needed to welcome them.

Now, if love is equal in both cases, accepted humiliation has the higher origin, for it comes from God.

It offers surer guarantees, since it is chosen by infallible wisdom. It gives little scope for self-love,



for it hides itself under the veil of necessity. A lofty and tranquil humility finds an immense joy in finding itself thus brought into God's plan, and without seeing the extent of it she is assured beforehand that it is beautiful and fatherly.

## SEVENTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XXVIII

#### SOME PRECAUTIONS

First point : The care that God takes of our humility.

Second point : Our correspondence with this Divine care.

*Evening Preparation.*—In this meditation we shall study the principal reason for the love of abjection; we shall see why Providence gives it so large a place in His education of the finest souls. Abjection is a preservative and a remedy for their humility; it dissipates the fumes of self-love that arise from our natural pride; and at the same time, by its exterior humiliation it counterbalances, in the eyes of men, the dangerous admiration with which they surround virtue.

It is a preservative, but it is something else besides—it is a stimulus. To poor human nature, prone to fall asleep, sensible wounds are necessary, like the spur to the flanks of the courser, to awaken its ardour.

Under these blows the need of God is felt more keenly and prayer becomes more fervent.

This is a benefit common to it with sorrow, with this difference, that it leaves behind it a feeling of abase-

ment. This feeling, when it is deep and peaceful, keeps the heart softened towards God, and especially gentle towards our neighbour.

It gives to the physiognomy itself something kind and deferent, that is the reflection of true humility.

Let us add that, by the entire detachment that it brings about, the love of abjection gives complete liberty to the soul; it is the strong beating of the wings that frees it from the earth's law of gravity. Hereafter the aerial way to the heights is open to its flight.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to see God and His goodness in all that humiliates me.

I. *The care that God takes of our humility.*—Humility is so needful to us that God permits humiliation to befall us in everything and everywhere.

Our qualities are accompanied by defects, and usually we have the defects of our qualities. But if they are perfect they may be misunderstood, and may draw down upon us malice and envy.

O my God, how kind Thou art in Thy wisdom!

We wish to be good, but even this wish is often accompanied by imperfection rendering it either over-eager or discouraged. Sometimes imprudence or awkwardness nullifies it.

Should we strive to arouse indignation against ourselves? No, it is all for my good.

O my God, how kind Thou art in Thy wisdom!

Sometimes what we do with the best intentions is disputed, thwarted, and spoilt, and the failure is attributed to us. O my God, still and always, how kind Thou art in Thy wisdom!

Our interior life is also full of humiliations; coldness and dryness in our prayers, depression in our work, hopeless insensibility, disgust with everything. Such is the lot of some souls well beloved of God. In their distress they cry: "Why, O Father, why?" And He replies: "My child, understand that thou art nothing and canst do nothing. This experimental knowledge is worth more than years of consolations. Plunge thy roots into the depths of thy nothingness. Weary of thyself, turn thine eyes to Me." I thank Thee, O Father, I thank Thee!

But why these temptations that menace the very life of my soul? Why these base calculations that I do not wish? Why these ignominious images that flout my will, but that my nature relishes? *Virtus in infirmitate perficitur*—"All this is to make thee humble." O Father, grant at least that I may never offend Thee!

Alas! alas! there must at times be something more, our pride is so great that there must be faults. God reluctantly withdraws His arms and we fall. Why? O my God, why? Jesus to heal the blind man, mingled clay with His spittle. The proud can only be cured by humiliation; for certain kinds of blindness clay must be used. Thanks, O my God, for this stern grace. But I pray Thee that this extreme remedy may work my cure.

II. *Our correspondence with this Divine care.*—After these considerations let us firmly resolve to correspond with this operation of the Divine wisdom.

Our first duty is to discover it by studying the causes of humiliation that it has deigned to place within us and around us. There are many, and we

must do our best to be sensible of them. If I am not impressionable, this grace will be lost, this means will be thrown away. God will find it necessary to drive home the hard lesson in another way. We must beware of the ruses of self-love. It is so apt to blind us to our defects, and so skilful in avoiding exterior humiliation. Let us only excuse ourselves when God requires it.

Let us leave upon our frail virtue the thorns that protect it.

Let us compel ourselves to love the humiliation of these things. To love abjection is truly to love humility, and to nourish it substantially.

To love humility without loving abjection would be to deceive ourselves.

Abjection is to have many apparent defects, it is to fail, to see ourselves incapable, to be tempted by degrading things: and to love abjection is to be content with all this, sin excepted. It is to cultivate a constant recollection of it.

O wisdom of my God, at last I catch a glimpse of you in the precautions you have taken to keep me humble. *Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me*—"It was for my good and I did not know it."

And to what have I not forced God's wisdom by my blindness? How do I stand even now? Have I any love for the abjections designed to aid me?

What a glorious vision will meet our eyes when at the close of life the wisdom of our Father in safeguarding our humility will be revealed!

All these Whys that perplex us when we are faced with the contradictions that even the Saints themselves suffered will then be explained.

Then our clinging imperfections, our strange failures, our faults themselves, in a word, all those woeful miseries that affright us now, will extort from us cries of admiration. Wisdom will then be seen in everything, and will be justified of herself.

The ignorant, seeing a gardener place thorns round a delicate plant, might exclaim: "How ugly that looks!" Thus do we criticise the celestial Gardener!

O my God, how kind Thou art in Thy wisdom!

RESOLUTION.—To seek the humiliation that is most painful to me; to receive it from the hand of God; to set myself to be content with it.

## PRUDENCE IN HUMILITY

Several passages in this book have already dealt with the action of humility on prudence. We have seen how it dissipates the illusions which obscure our judgment, the excessive confidence in self that will not admit any self-doubt nor advice; how it calms the eagerness that will not wait to consider the best means, and softens the obstinacy that aggravates error or failure. To-day we shall see prudence playing an analogous rôle with regard to humility, communicating to it that spirit of discernment and moderation without which it may go sadly astray.

We shall not concern ourselves with the merely human prudence that, in its ignorance, would confine humility within its own narrow limits, but with that supernatural prudence that derives its standards from revealed truth, and has always in view the greater

glory of God; that prudence whose scope is as wide as the example of the Saviour, and as far reaching as goodness itself.

To confine humility to a precise mean that would exclude the least as well as the greatest actions would be to reduce it to mediocrity. The wise mean that reason approves is that which forbids either excess or carefulness, for neither is a virtue. Perfect virtue, the virtue of Jesus, is to be found between the two extremes, and extends even to heroism.

Humility would not be a virtue if it lessened us. All virtue tends to perfect our being, for perfection consists in coming close to God, Who is the All-Being, and deriving from Him the fullest possible life. This is true even of physical qualities, is still more so in the development of intellectual qualities, and is above all true of the moral qualities in which virtue dwells.

But what, then, becomes of the doctrine of self-effacement, abjection, and love of contempt, that has been the subject of the principal preceding meditations? Our ideas of virtue and humility seem to contradict each other here, virtue tending to aggrandise us, and humility unremittingly to abase us.

No, humility does not abase and lessen us. A self-effacing humility does not modify what we really are, but only what we seem to be; it does not limit our value, but our pretensions.

Abject humility, instead of putting great things far from us, shows them to us as the desirable reward of the trials under which we groan.

As for the love of scorn, by teaching us to blush at nothing, it tempers our souls. All these phases of

humility only insure to virtue its beauty by destroying in it all impure alloy, and its liberty by detaching it from all self-obsession.

The part of prudence is precisely to confirm and maintain this order, to counter false ideas and ill-considered efforts.

Her part is to guide the movement of our acts of humility; to bring into play, according to circumstances, such and such forms of the virtue, and so to moderate its play that nature is kept in equilibrium and its attractions better discerned.

I. *Prudence in action.*—Like all the other virtues, humility must be brought under the control of prudence; it cannot take a step without its consent, it can never lawfully resist its orders. Of itself it might be moved to undignified manifestations or feeble hesitancy; it is indeed a characteristic of every attraction to carry us to the limits of its impulse, and its usual weakness to see only its own particular aim.

Prudence takes a wider view; she does not allow the neglect of a useful action simply because it happens to be conspicuous; she is opposed to everything that diminishes our personality, lowers our moral worth, and arrests the development of good.

We must not represent her as austere and dry. She has a sense of beauty as well as a sense of justice. She bids us repel all that is ugly as something that is lowering. Moral ugliness is incompatible with virtue, it is not the work of God and cannot be useful to man. It intrinsically degrades those on whom it is imposed, and Heaven cannot welcome it in any form. For this reason it is that prudence pitilessly denies to humility every gesture and expression that savours of the



ridiculous; this is why she preserves it from all, even interior deformity. She wishes it to be frank and serene; she makes it unselfish and compliant, abandoned to the will of God, and desirous above all of His greater glory.

Our own initiative is not destroyed, far from it; put in its rightful place, sustained in its part, it seeks with all its might to accomplish the Divine Will that creates a host of secondary initiatives.

She does not in the least require that we should abdicate our rights, but she prevents us from pressing them too far. She does not paralyse our activity, but she subordinates it.

I am inclined to effacement, humiliation, contempt, it is the particular attraction that humility presents to me; but before every demand of a superior will, assigning to me a certain task or requiring from me co-operation, I restrain myself submissively, and lend to it the full strength of all my faculties and virtue. The goal is more clearly discerned, and the means of attaining it better chosen, for I am not blinded by the unruly desire for self-esteem.

To restrain the exercise of humility is not to decrease it. Certain acts, words, and abasements may be forbidden, but the inclination and the love that prompt them only grow by the suppression of desire and the effort that it costs. Nothing can hinder it from singing within us its constant hymn of admiration, or from permeating our whole moral life with an influence that preserves and charms.

Go forward, then, steadfastly, O souls smitten with humility! If the exercise of the virtue has its limits, the love of it has none, and virtue lies in this love; the

sentiments of the heart are at the same time meritorious acts and a useful preparation.

And you, less generous souls, act, act ! Mistrust the doubts that perhaps arise from timidity. Before turning away from any humiliation, ask yourself what conscience requires of you, and if you wish to be perfect incline to what is most humiliating, and do not give in except for fear of a fault.

We ought, however, to take account of our present strength ; in exceeding our courage we lessen it, in exceeding His grace we tempt God.

In ordinary actions we may show a humility that is suitable to all ; and each act faithfully performed helps to form habit. For the rest, the future is before us. Let us seek, even in the humiliation of not being humble, the desire to become so.

II. *Prudence determines the kind of humility that is expedient.*—Prudence is not content to encourage or maintain humility in the actions of the moment, but, carrying her counsels farther, she determines the kind of humility to be adopted as suitable to the position of each individual. There is one type of humility for a religious, another for a woman of the world, or the mother of a family responsible for a numerous household ; another for a political man or a soldier. This is obvious. Everyone will acknowledge that gestures and manner, words and decisions, must take a different form according to circumstances, but what is less understood is that all these exterior acts may at all times bear the same stamp. Some will say that forms suitable for public use by one in authority may be dropped in private. Is it not more perfect to exercise exterior

humility whenever circumstances do not compel its restraint?

Prudence sees farther: she knows that an attitude is not easily adopted, and that it loses force unless it is a matter of habit; this is why she counsels the exclusion of every mode of life that interrupts it. Even our very thoughts and feelings must all be brought into unison. Virtue is harmony, and this harmony is the result of a common life. Every interior act leaves its mark; its influence and character pass into the exterior appearance; we see its features as we see in children the features of those of whom they are the offspring.

There is peril in this, but it is too evident to escape the experienced eyes of prudence and the sagacity of her means of preservation. Her aim is intrinsically to strengthen virtue. To persons who have to appear and to command, she proposes a deep and strong humility; she counsels every practice that will abase them in the eyes of God and themselves, but she forbids anything that might tend to a diminution of prestige or authority.

Let such be reassured; to the grace according with their state and which will not be wanting, God may add the grace of real humiliations which they are forbidden to seek. Coming from Him, they will concur with His designs and should cause no disturbance. Rather they should be welcomed as a providential help against pride, regarded as a happy compensation, loved with the love that is felt for humility, and given as much scope as prudence will allow.

III. *Prudence moderating the exercise of humility in order to preserve equilibrium.*—What prudence

prescribes as a safeguard in certain circumstances, she also prescribes to certain natures with a view to give them balance.

Some people are always doubtful of themselves, of their capacity and their success. Hesitation paralyses their initiative or makes it painful.

Too much self-confidence is a vice, but so also is excessive self-mistrust; one is not less disastrous than the other. The latter fills the soul with anxiety and deforms it, feebleness creeps into every action and spoils its efficacy.

It may be said that virtue after all consists in a right appreciation of things and in goodwill, but we forget that it consists rather in the dispositions of our nature. Our nature is the foundation of all our actions, the foundation that sustains them; it is in it that habits are established. We cannot neglect this permanent force with impunity. The consciousness of duty may demand energetic conduct, but only a nature fully prepared can impose it and bear the burden of it without flinching.

A soul in which there is too great a distrust of self would be mistaken in cultivating the sense of its own weakness, or to incline too much to self-depreciation before others, especially if she has a mission to fulfil. Let her keep herself free from pride and pretension, let her seek God in all that she does, and to command only in His name—nothing more. A peaceful humility will then fill her life, restoring its serenity and sustaining it.

But for the rest, let her put resolutely aside the too lively impression of her deficiencies, her mistakes, her inferiorities, lest she depress a character already

wanting in buoyancy; and also because, in the midst of her alarms, self-love may easily find a place for itself, for self-love is suffering, and this is the special menace of such natures.

Those who have charge of such timid souls should give them confidence in themselves by opportune marks of approval; by allowing them to act independently in order to develop their initiative; by helping them in various ways to make a reputation for themselves where they live; by reassuring them, raising them, and leading them at last to that ease of word and action which is the result of a sense of God, no doubt, but also is the just consciousness of their own powers.

To act thus is to help talent to fructify, instead of wrapping it up inactive in the shroud of a misplaced humility.

IV. *Prudence respecting a wisely recognised attraction.*—We have seen that the Saints for the most part are bent on self-abasement; they feel a bitter-sweet joy in heaping upon themselves the most humiliating epithets, and find in the frequently renewed sentiment of their own abject condition the stimulus of their fervour.

On the other hand, we see extremely generous souls, who, nevertheless, cannot remain in this frame of mind and would feel uneasy in it.

Like the Saints, they may have a deep sense of their unworthiness, but they cultivate the impression of it less. These souls are often peculiarly pure, evil has not branded them with its dishonourable marks, temptation itself has respected their innocence. How can they be indignant against what they scarcely

know? In others the delicacy of a refined nature really suffers at the sight of any stain.

In others, again, the sense of beauty is so developed that they turn instinctively from all that is ugly or deformed. Any sort of contact with these things even in thought seems to give them a sense of having been touched by some disgrace; their courage suffers and their flight Godwards is arrested.

Would it be just to condemn such repugnances? Would it be wise to do them violence? We do not think so.

The characters that we have just described warn prudence that it is her duty to make such providential dispositions respected.

To such souls she will say: Do not disturb yourselves, it is not essential to virtue to envisage everything, it is sufficient to retain what promotes it. What is most renowned and most excellent is not always best for certain souls, but rather that which, according better with their nature, arouses them to the greatest efforts.

Doubtless motives of abjection carry humility far, but the motive of "everything in God" opens to contemplative souls horizons not less extensive.

The essential thing is that our humility shall be practical and generous. Whether it becomes so under this or that influence matters little. Face to face with the thought of the Infinite, we feel ourselves so small, whatever may be the success of our work or the gifts of our prayer; we cannot exalt ourselves on that account; whatever may be the misery of our neighbour, we can never despise him, we shall show ourselves always gentle, indulgent, and kind. If humiliation

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comes, let us look upon it with eyes that are accustomed to contemplate Calvary, and we shall open our arms to it as if to clasp Jesus with His Cross.

Even if we have no particular attraction to humility, why force it? Humility, like the other virtues, deserves a general worship, but it has no more right than its sisters to an altar apart in each temple. Your nature by its tendencies, sometimes by its defects, your education, in the formation of your habits of mind, your life with its relationships, have constituted you apt rather to one virtue than to another. All this is the work of Providence, and marks out your way. In this way you will walk more freely and you will go farther.

Cultivate, then, according to your attraction, purity of intention, union of thought with God, or gratitude. Cultivate abnegation, poverty, self-forgetfulness, devotion to others. Above all, develop Divine love, with its ardours and its intimacy. Without that you will wither away like a plant that is transferred to a soil that does not suit it, while with it you will spread forth your branches, scatter the perfume of your flowers, and give to God the fruits that He expects from you.





FIFTH WEEK  
TRANSFORMATION



## PREPARATION FOR THE FIFTH WEEK

IN the first pages of this book we analysed the two tendencies that humility has the task of directing : self-esteem, and desire for the esteem of others. Both, as we have seen, have for their object the safeguarding of our personality, the one by the affirmation of our own worth, the other by courting the esteem that protects us. This is their rôle and also their danger. In themselves, both are blind forces that over-reach their object, unless truth and justice come to guide and, if need be, to restrain them. Indeed, pushing too far the protection of the one, or rather its exaltation, they would make of ourselves our principle and end—our principle, as if good came from ourselves and not from God ; our end, as if we had the right to seek our own glory rather than His. Such a reversal of the proper order of things would be not only a serious injustice and injury, but a grave disorder ; and though some excuse might be found for it in the unconsciousness that usually accompanies it, it would none the less produce its evil effects upon our moral life.

Valiant humility will not suffer it, and arming herself with the word of the Archangel she exclaims in her turn : *Quis ut Deus*. Begone, these senseless pretensions ! Who is the true Author of all good ? Who first deserves all praise ? Our proud self thus relegated to its proper place, God once more takes His throne. All our virtues recognise Him as their first principle, and all our actions direct themselves towards Him as

their last end. These two duties are the bases of the Christian life, the rule of its activity, the condition of its merit. In making them respected, humility justifies her title as the foundation and the guardian of the virtues.

Now we shall go on to see how she deserves another and more beautiful one, for she is also their crown.

Thus on the last pages of this book humility will be found ending her career, like a beautiful day, in a glow of triumph.

This new rôle proceeds from a new conception. So far humility has contented herself with the conquest of the two tendencies, now we shall see how she transforms them. In so far as they tended to earth she restrained them; now we shall see her directing them heavenwards.

Thus, nothing that God has created will be destroyed. Self-esteem will become admiration of the divine in us, and the desire for esteem will seek the regard of God Himself. These transformed dispositions will find a wider field for their activity, they will be set upon more satisfying objects, their beauty will lose its alloy; and finally, their action will be carried from God towards our neighbour by a supernatural extension.

Let us raise our hopes and our eyes, it is the time to do so. Defensive humility is firmly established, its enemies are unmasked and known, peace reigns on all sides, let us march on to pacific conquests.

The virtue we are in pursuit of is the virtue of the Saints, and above all of Mary; it will be in a manner the virtue of our eternity.

Ah! How I should wish to press on to this new

world! How I should desire to give to my commonplace soul this wondrous transformation! Is it possible that what has been achieved in the souls of the Saints may, in a limited degree, be achieved in mine? What Thou dost in heaven, O God, wilt Thou not deign to effect on earth? And what also I shall do there, may I not begin here? If one day I shall be deified in the contemplation of Thy glory face to face, why should I not be transformed here in contemplating Thee through the flimsy veils of Thy mysterious creation?

## FIRST MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XXIX

#### THE TRANSFORMATION OF SELF-ESTEEM

First point : The gifts of God.

Second point : Humility.

*Evening Preparation.*—If I wish to esteem myself properly I must look for those things in myself that come from God, especially in the supernatural order. The great gifts I shall discover will doubtless help me to understand the loftiness of Christian dignity. It will be the highest flight of the tendency that is called self-esteem. I shall then survey without scruple or exaggeration the total sum of God's gifts. If I mount high enough I shall see my personal qualities emanating from Him, all my actions sustained by Him, and the beauty of my soul as a reflection of His own beauty; or rather, I shall cease in a sense to see myself, so much shall I feel myself filled with the divine.

We must bring to this meditation a mind freed from

vulgar ideas and disposed to a just admiration, a wide mind that is not hindered by trifling difficulties. We must bring to it, above all, a great spirit of faith.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to understand these truths as if they were presented to me for the first time; to penetrate them, to feel them and to be impressed by them.

I. *The gifts of God.*—What I am as a human being: the masterpiece of creation; the sovereign ruler of matter; a little world in which the universe is reflected through the medium of the senses, and is transformed in idea through the effort of the intelligence; a kind of heaven where God makes Himself known as an Infinite Being and the Author of all things; moral freedom, by means of which I am master of my actions and of my destiny.

Ah! how familiar all these wonders are to me! We think so little of what we have always known! To admire man needs to be astonished!

But let us remember that one gleam of intelligence is greater than the whole of the starry host of heaven! that an act of the will is a higher force than all the movements of the sea! and that the wonderful instinct of the animal world is of less value than a single thought!

At the same time the lustre of these natural gifts fades before the beauty of the gifts of grace, for these are of such an order that the Almighty could not create a being to whom they were natural as reason is natural to man. Grace can only be a transformation. It is a participation in the Divine nature, with its need



of the Infinite and its ability to contemplate It face to face. It is a Divine life in the compass of our rude being, and because it is Divine, a life that God alone can exercise in us; each of our supernatural acts needs His movement both to be born and to endure. Ah! if our eyes should be suddenly opened, we should see this God, the Sovereign Being, in a manner at our service, continually working to deify us. All this is true though it is hidden from us. Oh! to believe it, to believe it enthusiastically!

This at least would be to catch a glimpse of it, and to begin really to know ourselves.

A more tender tie binds me to Jesus. Jesus is my friend, He gives me His Heart and His goods. Jesus is my brother, He has taken my nature. Jesus is something of my own; He is my great glory, or rather, I am something of His and it is my great happiness. I belong to Him like the little cell buried deep in my body which receives its life by the action of my brain; like the little wave of blood that swells the most distant of my arteries, and which comes from my heart; a mysterious union here on earth that will be radiant in heaven; an incomparable title of dignity to those who understand; I am a part of the mystic being of Jesus, I can lessen or increase It; I am necessary to His happiness; I can deceive His hopes. It is given to me either to allow Him to live fully in me, or to prefer to Him, alas! the sorry expansion of my own life by my inordinate pursuit of the pleasures and plaudits of this world.

Dost thou not find, O my soul, that these grandeurs suffice to satisfy thy sense of self-esteem and to establish thy nobility? What nobility more ancient

than that which comes from the Eternal? What nobility more illustrious than that which is descended from the Highest?

By Jesus I am the issue of the very blood of God, and my life is nourished by a Divine food. Need I wait for heaven to pride myself in these glories? Heaven will make them shine more brightly, it is true; but grace already enriches me with them. Shall I disdain them because I share them in common with others?

Does the good of others diminish my own good? Far from it; rather it augments it in countless ways, by the examples it affords me, the charitable aids it brings me, and by the special virtues that it calls into play.

II. *Humility makes the gifts of God resplendent.*—Unbelief is the blindness that surveys creation without discovering God in it. The proud man perhaps sees God in nature, but he does not see Him in himself. He attributes everything he does to himself, and what he is he believes is his own personal character. Most frequently it is not presumption, but unconsciousness.

Such a man injures God not by driving Him away, but by ignoring Him.

In proportion as humility sheds its beautiful light upon this blindness, the evidence of God's action appears, is extended, and finally encroaches upon our whole personality, as the sun on its rising floods the earth with its beams.

Man's greatness here below is to seek God. If he seeks Him in nature, he finds Him everywhere, even in the smallest grain of sand; if he seeks Him in himself, he finds Him in every part of his being and even

in the least of his actions. It follows that the humble man does not prefer himself to anyone, and that when he admires anything in himself, in a sense he admires it on his knees.

Formerly the prudence of a great people led them to place behind the throne of a conqueror a herald at arms, whose duty it was constantly to repeat to him this warning: "Remember that thou art a man." These are the words of humility; remember that beneath all these shows of greatness, thou art but a man, a nonentity! Keep thy rank, defend thine honour, take initiatives, insist and fight if necessary, but while doing all these lawful things, remember, remember! Never lose sight of the origin of thy gifts; never cease to realise the last end of thine actions.

If self-esteem were simply esteem for the work of God in every man, it would not then be a personal sentiment, but a form of worship. But this esteem regards those gifts as if they were our own, and this is why we need humility, to open our eyes to show us how fragile is our hold of them, and thus to moderate our natural inclination to magnify ourselves on their account. With all her strength she opposes the vain complacency we take in them, and forbids us because of them to feel the least disdain for others.

There is no doubt that rightly to esteem self is a difficult and delicate virtue; without grace it would be unwise to aspire to it. A timid fearfulness most often prompts us to shut our eyes.

This is not wisdom, for danger can be avoided, and a true sense of personal dignity may not find elsewhere such a powerful motive to sustain it. Such a sense bestows a kind of royalty; and this royalty,

firmly established in its dominion, expels evil with an instinctive and invincible disdain. In the refinement of its tastes it tends to what is noblest. From the elevation of a throne, what is base and vulgar is detected even before it can approach.

Could we unveil the soul of a Saint, we should find surprise after surprise. The sentiment of self-esteem would appear in splendid growth; the Saints know that they are the Sons of God, participate in His nature, and are future inheritors of His glory.

They are supremely proud of their friendship with Jesus, of the resemblance to Himself that He has implanted in their souls, of the constant action that He exercises in the depths of their being.

These sentiments urge them constantly towards an ever-growing perfection, and their ambition, taking a more than human flight, darts to aspire to increase God Himself by working for His glory. We do not find them timid or hesitating in face of the most difficult enterprises or the most threatening dangers. We see with what an eye they regard the supreme abasement, sin; with what horror its assaults fill them. Seek where we will, nowhere shall we find such a lofty sense of personal dignity, such a sentiment of greatness and of strength; a sentiment at the same time perfectly gentle and peaceful because it is developed in the pure and calm atmosphere of truth, of goodness, and of most excellent beauty.

RESOLUTION. — To admire in myself the gifts of God, in order to give to the sense of personal dignity its highest motive. Not to content myself with a superficial view that teaches nothing and effects nothing.

## SECOND MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XXX

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DESIRE FOR  
ESTEEM

First point : To desire the esteem of God.

Second point : To desire to please Him.

Third point : To desire to give Him pleasure.

*Evening Preparation.*—The desire to be esteemed and the desire to please are so closely connected that they seem to constitute rather two manifestations of the same propensity. They are, however, distinct; the desire of esteem aims at approbation and aspires to be favourably judged; it is rather to the mind that it appeals.

The desire to please aims at the conquest of the heart; we wish to be affectionately esteemed.

The distance is still greater between the desire to please and the desire to give pleasure.

The first is, of its nature, personal; it is concerned with the satisfaction that esteem brings to ourselves.

The second, without being always disinterested, seeks first the satisfaction of others. Their common tie exists, however, in this, that the second is the outcome of the first, as effect is of its cause. He who wishes to please usually seeks to give pleasure.

Is it possible that the desire to please can be permeated by the Divine? Can so human a sentiment be transformed without ceasing to be itself? Again, let us gaze into the soul of a Saint. Do we see there the desire to please reduced to inertia? No, a thousand

times no; we find it rather in full activity, in greater extent, but above all in greater nobility. A new world has opened to him its transcendent perspectives, a world of supernatural beings; God, and God everywhere; Jesus more peculiarly our own, and in Jesus all who are bound up with Him, angels and men.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to open my mind to these beautiful thoughts, to acquire these fruitful sentiments, and thus to give to life this lofty direction.

I. *May we desire the esteem of God?*—If we had familiar relations with God, we should earnestly desire His esteem, as we desire the esteem of those among whom we live, especially the great. To obtain it is to come nearer to them, to enter their sphere, and to share their superiority.

But God is invisible and seems so far away. The esteem He may have for us cannot be shown by any exterior means; we do not hear it expressed in words, we cannot read it in His look.

Does this mean that all ways of understanding are closed to us? Are God's sentiments so secret that they do not betray themselves by any sign whatever? In default of word and look, have we no holy presumptions based on His direct assertions? We know with the utmost certainty that God loves goodness, the goodness of a transitory action as well as the goodness of a permanent quality. Thus, then, in accomplishing a virtuous action, and in perfecting our qualities, we are sure of gaining His esteem; and this esteem grows with the increasing purity of our actions and strength of our virtue.

A lively faith alone understands these things; love alone can make them its life. Alas! my poor soul may have a faith without that intimate conviction, and a love without these noble needs. Is it not useless for her to make a meditation that as yet is too high for her?

She may find in it only vague ideas that will profit her nothing. But on the other hand, it may arouse in her a desire for something better.

O God, Author of all light, enlighten me! O God, Creator of all good sentiments, enliven me! Deign to bring within my reach the truths that the Saints knew! Though I may never reach their heights, I shall grasp the same truth and shall tend to the same goal that they reached. Thou dost Thy work gradually in a soul, O God. Then to-day I will try at least to take some steps towards the desire to please Thee.

II. *How the desire to please God is exercised.*—It is the desire to attract His attention in a special way, to live in His smile, and finally to make ourselves loved by Him, for it is in this object that the desire to please normally ends, even in the human order.

The desire of obtaining some admiration.—Admiration is the supreme expression of esteem; it is necessary to a great love. How can we make ourselves admired by God? By every generous effort, by every noble action, by every exalted sentiment.

What is ordinary is not enough, there must be something more. Devotion is the first thing; from this we go on to the desire for sacrifice. In our fallen state immolation is the noblest action. Immolation, besides, supposes great strength of soul, a supremely estimable quality.



To devote ourselves to the cause of God, to sacrifice ourselves when called to do so, to immolate our wishes when they are a hindrance, to welcome trials sweetly, and a threatening future with courageous confidence—these are some of the ways in which we may win the admiration of the great Appreciator of everything.

To desire to delight God.—This is more than to attract His attention; it is more than to deserve His esteem; it is to begin to gain His Heart. This desire introduces a very personal stimulus,—to become a delight to the eyes of God, something that makes His Heart rejoice! What an ambition! what scope for the soul! All its faculties are satisfied, for they are aroused to the fullest life, they grow and are perfected in the pursuit of their high aim. If we are to charm God we must acquire moral beauty.

How careful of themselves are those who wish to please! How watchful they are over themselves, over their every word and gesture, and over the least detail of their lives!

O my God, if I truly desire to please Thine eyes and charm Thy Heart, I ought to be without any tastes, or wishes, or actuations of my own. I seem to be a stranger to this desire, yet I do not know why. Perhaps it is exhausted on other objects, or it needs to be encouraged in my soul. An interior life that is mediocre does not give rise to fervent aspirations: Oh! for purity of heart, for intimacy in prayer, for intensity of desire. To charm God! Why, even to dream of it means a generous piety.

Ah! if I could establish myself in this holy disposition! If I could give to my life this orientation! If I could devote longer hours to meditation! If,

during the day, I more often sought the regard of Him Whom I desire to please!

This regard must, above all, be the regard of Jesus, the God-Man, Jesus, my brother. To please Thee, to make myself loved by Thee, to obtain sweet praise from Thy lips, or to await it in heaven, what scope there is here for my desire to please!—a limitless field for my love and energy. Day and night Thy attention is fixed upon me, O Jesus; Thy Soul is sensitive to every sort of kindness, it is conscious of the most delicate shades. What I cannot express, what I feel without even understanding it, wonder of wonders! Thou readest clearly in my heart.

O Jesus, Thou art in Thyself alone a whole world, a bigger, fuller, more animated world than the world of men, where we compete for honour, and an honour rarely obtained, enjoyed in fear and never firmly held, for this world passes, and with it vanishes like smoke its vain esteem. But Thou, O Jesus! Thou bearest to heaven and makest eternal every feeling that I have roused in Thy great Heart, all the esteem that I may have succeeded in winning from Thee.

*III. In what the desire to give God pleasure consists.*

—The somewhat personal desire to attract the regard of God and to please Him elevates itself almost unconsciously into the disinterested desire to give Him pleasure. To give Him some joy, some glory, to devote oneself, to immolate oneself that these acts may honour Him, to enrich oneself with virtue that the sight of it may please Him! By virtue of the desire to charm and delight Him, we become smitten with the charms of God; by stripping ourselves of all that has kept us far from Him, we come to love His supreme

amiability above everything else; the desire to please creates the desire to give pleasure.

There is a whole new life in this more elevated order of sentiments. The qualities we show in our efforts to please take on a more beautiful, more tender, and perfect form. We bring them into constant exercise: if only we may please God! We live in the joy that we give Him not because we give it, but because we feel it in Him. We are consoled in our own troubles by the thought that He is happy. The detachment from self is brought about so gently that we are scarcely conscious of it, and in a manner so complete that God reigns in every part of us. We thus assure to virtue a more stable foundation and a more exalted crown. Caprice and inconstancy can find no foothold here, and pride itself seems to disappear, lost in the bosom of God.

O God so amiable and so beloved, since so many beautiful souls exist who have thus died to Thee and have no life but Thine, no other desire than Thy glory, no other joys than Thy joys, be pleased to instil into my poor heart some gleams of these desires.

If my wings are not strong enough constantly to reach such heights, permit at least that I may reach them in my meditations; there will then remain in my active life some traces of the lofty inspirations of those regions.

RESOLUTION.—To apply to myself the words of the first martyr, S. Stephen: "I see heaven open and Jesus at the right hand of His Father."

To-day I will seek the regard of Jesus, a regard that may say to me: "Thou pleasest me."

What shall I not attempt to obtain this favour!

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### EXERCISE XXXI

#### THE DESIRE TO PLEASE AND TO GIVE PLEASURE TO OTHERS

First point : God seen in our neighbour.

Second point : Jesus in our neighbour.

Third point : Practical rules.

*Evening Preparation.*—To show ourselves indulgent, easy, and kind, to everyone around us; to seek habitually to give them pleasure; and to allow each to feel the warm affection that gladdens—this is an ideal that poor human nature cannot fully realise in its own strength. Too many personal considerations, too much inconstancy, govern its feelings on the one hand; and on the other, too much moral deformity disfigures the objects of its affection. It needs beauty to help it.

Man can only give to man this ideal love by investing him with the divine Ideal. This is why we cannot meditate too much upon the counsel of the new law : See God in your neighbour ; see your neighbour in the bosom of your Saviour.

Have we really grasped this counsel of peace, of perfection, and of true happiness?

Does it control our feelings and appear in our actions? Alas! it is scarcely a conviction with us.

We repeat it as a well-known but empty phrase. But what do we expect? That God will perform a miracle and cry it from the heights of heaven? It is not His way. Or that the Divine Master will come and visibly take by the hand and present to us Himself each person whom He has given to us? He does it invisibly each day.

Is He not in the Host in every Mass? and in Holy Communion does He not give Himself to each? What more do we want?

O Divine Master, open my eyes, the eyes of faith that alone can discern Thee! When, to-morrow, I come to see Thee in my neighbour, towards whom I often feel bitterly and almost always indifferently, grant that I may begin to love him with the love that I bear Thee, O Jesus.

### MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask for a great spirit of faith in order to discover the divine that is hidden in every man, and a great wisdom to keep our desire to please and to give pleasure to our neighbour free from narrowness or excess.

I. *God in our neighbour*.—To direct towards God that desire to please and to give pleasure that is in the very depths of our nature is to elevate it in a wonderful way, and to give it an object that will not elude its effort. But here on earth God does not show His face, and it is in vain that we seek a clear manifestation of the pleasure we give Him. A smile or a sympathetic look is sufficient to reward an effort or to provoke it, but from heaven neither smile nor look descends to reassure us. Our supernatural relations are established

on the basis of the will. What is sensible, powerful though it may be, is never anything but an accessory. Many perfect souls find themselves habitually in desolation; yet even so, they continue with great strides along the austere path of duty, loving God with fidelity, devotion, and sacrifice, in the fashion of the strong. It is their way of giving Him pleasure.

Others, more consoled, feel sometimes in prayer the sweetness of a mutual love. But both have a perpetual hunger for God; the first because they have not tasted Him; the second because, having tasted Him, they are insatiable. Then both turn to their neighbour. God has made him in His image; to see their neighbour is in a sense to see Him. God has communicated to him His nature; to love him, then, is to love something of His.

Recall the touching scene in which Raguel receives the young Tobias. Read the Bible account of it: "And Raguel looking upon Tobias, said to Anna his wife: 'How like is this young man to my cousin!' And when he had spoken these words he said: 'Whence are ye, young men, our brethren?' But they said: 'We are of the tribe of Nephtali, of the captivity of Ninive.' And Raguel said to them: 'Do you know Tobias, my brother?' And they said, 'We know him.' And when he was speaking many good things of him, the angel said to Raguel: 'Tobias, concerning whom thou enquirest, is this young man's father.' And Raguel went to him and kissed him with tears, and weeping upon his neck, said: 'A blessing be upon thee, my son, because thou art the son of a good and most virtuous man.' And Anna his wife, and Sara their daughter, wept."



S. Francis of Sales makes the following comments upon the scene: "See how Raguel, without knowing the little Tobias, takes him in his arms, caresses him, kisses him, weeps for love of him. From whence sprang this love if not from that which he bore to the old Tobias, the father, whom this child so closely resembled? And, God of truth, when we see this neighbour of ours, created in the image and likeness of God, should we not say to one another: 'Behold, how like this creature is to the Creator!' Does it not behove us to bless him a thousand times? And why? For love of him? No, indeed, for we do not know whether in himself he is worthy of love or of hatred. Then why? For the love of God, Who has formed him to His image and likeness; for the love of God, of Whom he is, to Whom he belongs, in Whom he is, and for Whom he is; . . . and this is why not only does the Divine Love again and again command us to love our neighbour, but that Love Itself enkindles and spreads such love in the human heart, the likeness and image of Itself, for the sacred love of man to man is the true image of the celestial love of man to God."

Thus we may love everyone in advance with a general love; and when in the course of life some particular person, by his qualities, his feelings, and his deserts, acquires a special interest in our eyes, we shall see them as the work of God, the reflection of His perfections, the gift He places near us to help or to delight us. Thus in everything God shows Himself, making Himself beloved in those whom we love; and thus in the depths of our hearts God makes Himself felt as the new Principle of our affections, that are as



warm as before, but holily exalted. Have we thoughts such as these ?

*Reflections.*—What a beautiful and helpful point of view ! An incentive to universal kindness, consideration, and kindly services. A source of peace. An exaltation of our human affections : guardian of their dignity. A truly supernatural life, of which God is the object and the interior secret origin.

II. *Jesus in our neighbour.*—Let us go farther, and contemplate the Divine Presence as It is displayed to us in the Incarnation. Having given us His likeness, God, wishing to take ours, made Himself one of us. Why ? Was it only to redeem us ? If so, it would have sufficed to give His Blood. But why those thirty years of hidden life as obscure as our own ? Why those three years of public life during which He made Himself known to the world ? Why, if it was not to give us a perfect model of what man should be to man ?—a model so beautiful that at first we are baffled by it ; so meek and humble that it soon comes to appear imitable ; so strong and so tender that it takes possession of the heart ; in a word, so divine that we adore it on our knees, so human that we cannot help exclaiming : “ Oh ! my brother.”

When about to leave the earth, He cast at humanity this great sentence : “ Love one another as I have loved you,” and instinctively we look around us for beings to whom we may devote ourselves. And when He adds : “ What ye have done unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me,” we feel that beneath the words a great mystery lies hidden. It is not merely a pious recommendation, but a clear statement of a fact, the fact that the life of Jesus is in us ;

it is a doctrine as true as it is beautiful, and the determining principle of the truest, easiest, and most exquisite charity.

O adored Master, Thou dost require me to feel for my neighbour those sentiments that Thy Divine charm has evoked; Thou dost look for actions, no doubt, but Thou dost also expect sentiments, and such sentiments as will attract men, encourage them and help them to be better.

Thou dost cover the poor human personality with the brightness of Thy name, not to efface it, but to adorn and protect it.

Thou dost illumine it with Thy radiant image in order to lessen the shadows of its defects; Thou dost elevate it by Thine action within it; and all this to win for it a pity without contempt, an unfailing devotion and love that ascend even to Thee!

We cannot but desire to please those whom Jesus honours, and to give pleasure to those whom Jesus loves.

To wish to give our neighbour pleasure and to devote ourselves to that object is a programme that many Saints and unknown pious people have set before themselves. It is a programme that comprises every delicacy of love, every kindly service, every mark of consideration for others, the long-suffering of charity, every little act that is sweetened by a smile, and even that gentleness of word and welcoming aspect of face that become the characteristics of a heart in which God reigns and acts.

Our desire to please will be a desire to please God; it will grow and deepen under the influence of the Infinite; it will be purified by contact with Uncreated

Love; it will become entirely pleasing in the effort to give pleasure to God our Father. In this school of love the heart learns admirable lessons!

Now when it turns towards its neighbour, it will bring to him a delicate condescension, an elevation of love, and a constancy acquired in its relations with the Divine loveliness.

But when the wish to please descends from heaven to earth, it is exposed to many dangers. It is tempted to excess, to a selfish preoccupation that sees its own interest rather than the good to be done; and it may meet with obsequiousness taking the form of baleful flattery most harmful to the soul.

III. *Practical rules.*—The frequent renewal of a pure intention is the greatest safeguard against these temptations. O my God, I wish to be kind in order to be good and to please Thee.

In a pure soul any kind of infidelity is easily detected. Preoccupation is the first sign of danger. If it arises from unquietness of soul, examine it closer. If it degenerates into sadness or bitterness, be sure that some vice is at work. By examination and prayer you will discover it, and love of virtue will soon cast it out.

The first rule of this sentiment is, then, a defensive rule. The second is a rule of wise liberty. In trying to overcome one danger we must be careful not to fall into another. We must suppress without destroying. Because we are exposed to danger in our desire to please, we are not to retrench every pleasing manifestation of it. This would be uselessly to mutilate our nature, to impoverish our life, to snap the most sacred ties. Sadness would become the law of

perfection, and virtue would show itself under the parlous symbol of a tree stripped of its leaves.

Oh no, this is not the true ideal! The ideal is a desire to please conformable to the exigencies of the position of each individual; a frank and wholesome desire that is exercised under the influence of God and in His sight, shedding around it a gentle and penetrating charm that is the special glory of Christian virtue. "For that soul alone loves God who loves in Him those whom she loves."

What kind of a society would that be that should be animated by such sentiments! What peace! What a lessening of suffering! What consolation in our inevitable trials! A city of dreams that will never gladden the sun here on earth! Rather an ideal city whose members, dispersed here and there in the midst of universal egotism, are the heroes who are called Saints. Their example at least we have to excite individual generousities, and to maintain before the world the true type of an ideal Christian.

RESOLUTION.—Attentive vigilance, wise liberty, a gaze persistently fixed upon God.

## A SURVEY OF THE TWO SUCCEEDING MEDITATIONS

When the glory of Thabor had faded and the mysterious clouds dispersed, the Apostles "raising their eyes saw Jesus only."

Coming out of the lights and shadows of these long meditations, let us also raise our eyes and simplify our ideas by looking at Jesus only.

In the contemplation of His humility we shall become humble by imitation.

Imitation fixes its eyes on its model and borrows its features from it; union does still more, it draws it into itself and derives its life from it.

But imitation and union are two forms of the same sentiment, love; and two agents of the same work, perfection.

Such was the humility of Mary; and it is to its contemplation that the two last meditations are devoted.

It is also the most faithful likeness of the humility of Jesus; the white light of the moon, faint reflection of the sun, descends more gently on our eyes.

O most humble of pure creatures, you are also the most powerful. It is to you that we turn our eyes and our hopes. By love you communicate to us the humility of your Divine Son.

## FOURTH MEDITATION

### EXERCISE XXXII

#### MARY TRANSFORMED BY HER IMITATION OF THE HUMBLE JESUS

First point : The humility of imitation of Mary as a Mother.

Second point : Her humility as co-Redeemer.

Third point : To make ourselves humble by imitating Mary.

*Evening Preparation.*—If we would study the depths of Mary's humility, we should have to apply to it the ideas that we have just been meditating upon. This is not our purpose here, but before approaching

the special subject we have in view, let us note the two very important differences between her humility and ours.

Mary saw the reasons for being humble with a perfectly clear, constant, and penetrating vision. We forget and lose sight of them; Mary never.

She is always conscious of them and unweariedly contemplates them; her eyes are ever open to the sight of the Infinite and her own littleness. The Magnificat is the secret canticle of her every hour. *Respexit humilitatem, fecit mihi magna.*

The state of our humility is such that to safeguard it God shelters its frailty beneath imperfections, or at least beneath mysterious ignorances. Delicate plants need a little shade.

In Mary's case God takes no such precautions. He exposes her to the full sunshine of truth.

She is immaculate, she is perfect. "She is blessed among women," and she knows it!

She has grasped, better than any theologian, the full greatness of her divine maternity, and she knows all its prerogatives. But the fulness of grace she has received only makes her more sensible of the depth of her own nothingness.

"No creature, save Jesus, has descended into such depths of humility"—*Nulla creatura, post Filium, tantum descendit in abyssum humilitatis* (S. Bernardine of Siena).

Now, such humility is heroical, and heroism is the quality that is brought into play in sublime and difficult actions. Then what shall we say of a quality that, during the whole life, accomplished what no man could sustain for a single day?

## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to love Jesus enough to feel an ardent desire to imitate Him.

I. *The humility of imitation of Mary as Mother.*—The humble Jesus was her Son, her own Son, belonging to her and to her alone; her well-beloved Son, her God and her Son—her all.

And she loved Him! Happier still, she adored Him in her love. Ah! if mothers could! All else is silent in the presence of this sentiment, everything is accomplished in this intense flame of love.

And she loved a humble Jesus, for she knew no other. There is no Jesus but Jesus incarnate, and Jesus incarnate is Jesus annihilated.

From the first moment He made Himself humble, and He will remain humble as long as He is a man and her Son.

And she studied Him,—with her eyes, with her heart, with her intuitions, as a mother. The mother has the genius of divining everything. Her thoughts, like her life, are wrapped up in this Being Who is always hers.

The heart imparts great intuitive power. The heart commands and the intelligence obeys. It presses it so hard at times that it oversteps its proper sphere.

The heart is the nest in which everything is brought forth. Creation owes its existence to the love of God.

In the heart of Mary each act and word and gesture of her Son were renewed and pondered. *Conferens in corde suo.* The humble Jesus grew up in the presence of her ecstatic love. What a school of humility to live in the sight of His Divine Mysteries, His littleness,



His weakness, His poverty, and the love with which He loved these things!

Later she watched Him at work, admiring His modesty, His gentleness, His love of humiliating occupations, His love of the insignificant—the continual miracle of His self-effacement.

We may say that she knew her Jesus by heart, her humble Jesus! To imitate Him became her law, her need, and almost unconsciously she made herself humble by not seeking herself in anything. She loves to share the shade where He is hidden, the silence in which He seems to be lost, she delights in abasing herself ever lower and lower, with Him!

But He is so far ahead of her that, though she follows Him closely, she never catches Him up, and she beseeches Him to wait for her. But He presses on. He is hastening to Calvary. "We shall arrive there together," He calls back to her.

II. *Her humility of imitation as co-Redeemer.*—Already, over His cradle, passes the breath of death; the distant voices of the Prophets sound these ominous words—"expiation," "victim." Distressing presentiments fill the Mother's heart. What! this gentle Face will be struck! these little Hands, these little Feet, will be pierced with nails! and this Innocent will be raised on the infamous Cross!

Ah! if she could take His place! No, she cannot take it, but she will occupy it with Him, for not only is she His Mother, she is His divine associate. As Mother she set herself to be united with her Son in every intention and trial and heart-beat. He has made her His co-Redeemer.

See her, then, armed with the right to share His saving humiliations; rather, indeed, to will them with

Him. Her Son wills to be humiliated, and she wills that He shall be; she suffers acutely, but still she wills it; her Son wills to die, and she wills that He shall die; she is immolated on Calvary with Him. When He is dead, sublime part! she is left alone to suffer the humiliations which are attached to the Body of her well-beloved! Thus by a mother the sacrifice is still prolonged!

III. *With Mary to make ourselves humble by imitation.*—Since love has this power, let us love. Love contemplates, love divines, love imitates.

It is beautiful to become humble by love. Without depriving humility of anything, it is to give it a motive more exalted than itself.

It is right that we should become humble by love, for is not charity the queen, the origin of all the virtues, the only giver of life?

To become humble by love is wise. Nothing is so powerful as love, nothing so attractive; by its means we shall acquire humility more easily.

Fear cramps; it may restrain from evil, it may even give a certain impulse towards good; but love alone opens wide our hearts, and does away with evil in the best way by raising us above it.

Let us, with Mary, contemplate Jesus humble in His mysteries, in His words, in His Person, in His Sacred Heart, in His Eucharist. With her let us take a delight in imitating Him. *In odorem unguentorum tuorum currimus*,—let us run after the perfume of His ointments.

RESOLUTION.—To make a sweet picture of the humble Jesus, to look at it frequently and to adopt the sentiments of Mary.

## FIFTH MEDITATION

## EXERCISE XXXIII

MARY TRANSFORMED IN THE HUMBLE JESUS  
BY UNITY OF LIFE

First point : Jesus living in Mary.

Second point : Jesus living in us.

*Evening Preparation.* — To-morrow we shall meditate upon that beautiful union of life that is formed by grace and crowned by glory, the mysterious but veritable union of Jesus with the souls of the just in one mystical Body.

In Mary this common life existed in a fashion apart ; she shared it in an eminent manner and developed it to an extent impossible to gauge.

Yet between her condition and ours there is this likeness : Mary lived the life of Jesus, and so do we ; she was a member of His mystical Body, and in an inferior degree so we are.

This lofty truth is for us a source of dignity ; *noblesse oblige* ; a motive of great delicacy ; Jesus wills to share our feelings ; a stimulus to progress : He looks to us for an increase of His Life.

To-day we have contemplated Jesus with a view to imitate Him. To-morrow we shall contemplate Him in ourselves in order to unite our actions with His.

## MEDITATION

PRELUDE.—To ask the grace to derive from this meditation a great increase of delicacy, generosity, and spiritual joy.

I. *Jesus living in Mary.*—What a beautiful exchange took place between Mother and Son! Mary communicates her own life to Jesus. With her blood first and then with her milk she forms His sacred Body. She transmits to Him the physical resemblance that is seen in face and gait and manner. Moreover, she passed on to Him those moral likenesses that are the result of temperament and constitute family tastes and dispositions. What did she not give Him?

Jesus in turn communicates to His Mother His life of grace, and He does it royally. He gives her a plenitude of this life, yet a plenitude that nevertheless will go on increasing.

In His life as the Man-God Jesus lived in Mary, and with the whole strength of her mind and will Mary kept herself in constant union with Him. The more she grew in grace, in merits, and in love, the more deeply she entered into this community of life. Each mystery brought her fresh light and increased her ardour of love. From the first the Mother and Son seemed to live one life, but the Holy Communion completed this union. This time Mary was the recipient, and the life that was given her in exchange for the gift of hers was the life of a God more than ever annihilated.

Verily from the depths of her heart she could cry, as did later S. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ Who liveth in me."

We may admire and congratulate this Son and this Mother. By Mary, at least, the humiliations that Jesus suffered would be fully understood, imitated, and shared.

II. *Jesus living in us.*—"Jesus lives in me, in me

too"—*Vivit vero in me Christus. Mihi vivere Christus est*—He is my life. How am I to understand this? Does it mean the gift of His life that He has made to me on the Cross?

Doubtless, but this gift is rather the source of my life than my life itself, for life is defined as the interior spring of action.

The life here spoken of is rather an influence, interior and actual, flowing from Him to me, an extension in me of the very life of Jesus. Thus is the vine extended in the shoot that it forms and nourishes.

But that this life may permeate and vivify me, the sacred Vine and the shoot must by some means touch and be united; communication must be established between them. But Thou art so far from me in heaven, O Jesus.

It is true that Jesus in His Humanity remains afar in His heaven, and that Holy Communion gives Him to us but in a fleeting fashion, yet it binds us to Him in His Divinity in such a manner that His thoughts, His wishes, His graces, and His life itself are transmitted to us. Ever living He knows us, He loves us, and unceasingly prays for us—*Semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis*.

If I evoke the past to discover the Jesus of the Gospels, if in order the better to see and hear Him I transport myself to the places where He lived, if I love to imagine His face and the sound of His voice, why should I not in the same way span the distance between heaven and earth and approach Him with my heart?

Jesus lives on high in glory, but He does not live for Himself. He is our Head and is ever working for

the regeneration of humanity. When, mingled with thousands upon thousands of other prayers, my prayer rises to Him, He distinguishes it and listens to it as if it were the only one. He has followed my steps from my earliest infancy : nothing in me is strange to Him, not even my human troubles. He has thoughts about my future and a beautifully designed plan for it. I love to imagine Him deep in thought and that His thoughts are of me, and to see Him suppliant before His Father and to think that He is asking for a grace, for pardon, and for progress, for me !

Oh ! to think of this dear and noble Head busying Himself with the welfare of His smallest member !

This action is hidden, it is true, but it is real ; I have no need to feel it, I believe it ; and this faith is one of the strongest incentives to my fervour. Could I make up my mind to remain mediocre ? If I did I should arrest the growth of the life of Jesus in me. Will Jesus think this thought with me ? Will He make His own this action that I design to do ? Will His Heart be united with mine in this affection ? Can I wish Him to mingle His sentiments with mine if they are base ? His thoughts with mine if they are impure ? Can I drag Him into my self-seeking pride and dreary egotism ? He would turn away ; His grace would not accompany me ; communion would be broken.

On the other hand, I may render Jesus greater in His mystical being ; I may increase the life of His great Body, and in doing this I shall surpass my own limitations, I shall meet Him with all my initiative and put at His service all my activity, and if I do not perceive the inspirations of His grace within me, I shall seek to discover His wishes in His teaching and

example, for still and always His thoughts are the thoughts He expressed when on earth.

Thus, then, O Jesus, we shall live together. The works done under Thy influence become common to us both. They are mine, since I accomplish them freely; they are Thine, since all that is supernatural in them is the work of Thy grace. Take them, then, for they are Thine; receive them, since they are also mine; and unite them to Thy great mystical Body.

If my admiration is aroused by the immensity of Thy life in the millions of souls that have been created by Thee during the centuries, the thought of Thy fatherly attention to each individual soul delights me with the intimacy of Thy love. I am amazed and as if speechless in the remembrance that I belong to Thee, and that through me Thou becomest greater!

Happy those souls who understand these wonders, wonders that are hidden from most; happier still those who cultivate the charm of them; they will sink from abyss to abyss ever deeper into humility, far from the pettiness of miserable pride. *O amare! o ire! o sibi perire! o ad Deum pervenire*—"To love Thee! to follow Thee! to lose myself and to find Thee, O God, my supreme good!" (S. Augustine).

RESOLUTION.—Before any decision to consult my heart: an instant is sufficient when we are very near Him.



## PARTICULAR EXAMEN

SPIRIT of light and truth, enlighten and touch my soul!

Convinced of the infinite goodness of our Lord and of my own misery and ingratitude, am I engulfed in His meek and humble heart, as He truly desires me to be? Do I keep myself hidden there, annihilated, and relinquishing my all too personal life that I may live His Life for Him?

In the morning act of humility, in Holy Communion, and in my spiritual exercises, do I think of Him annihilating Himself with me before His Father?—To annihilate self in adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and prayer.

Have I procured Him the joy that He seeks of tasting in me exterior and interior humiliations?—humiliations coming from God, from my neighbour, from myself, from every untoward event.

With Him have I turned against myself when my pride and self-seeking have made themselves felt? Do I promptly unite myself with the contempt that Jesus, Who is living in me, feels for them?

Do I recollect that it is a meek and humble Jesus Who seeks to live in me? In this thought, with my superiors, do I show myself simple and humble, feeling myself in the hands of God? with everyone about me, only speaking of myself in all simplicity, giving up and even despising my own ideas when possible? with inferiors, showing no exigence, but on the contrary much sweetness?

Have I made this simple question my rule of discrimination: Can Jesus think this thought with me? love in this affection? accompany me in this proceeding?

Have I found peace in these words: "Provided that Jesus is content"? and courage in this assurance: "I shall add to His brow a ray of glory"? Have I kept in mind always to allow Him to live, to grow, and to take His delight in me?

In Jesus, have I given up all preoccupation with self, forgetting "her who is not" in order to occupy myself solely with "Him Who is"?

Have I referred all good to God? Have I counted absolutely upon His aid for triumph over all evil? O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, live freely in my soul!

## REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATION OF HUMILITY TO DIVINE LOVE

WHEN I contemplate on the one hand humility, poor in appearance, abased, seeking the shade; and on the other love, in its pride, its brightness, its longing for expansion, I ask myself how the assertions of the Saints, comparing and uniting them, can be justified. But as my insight becomes more penetrating, I discern between these two sentiments a connection so close that they may be considered inseparable; a likeness so striking that we recognise their common origin; a reciprocal action so perfect that we are led to ask whether love and humility are not a compound forming one virtue, as the body and soul form the human ego.

Assuredly humility and love constitute two distinct virtues; but it is not temerity to say that we never see them apart. Born from the same source, they both give to God the preference over all else, and both speak the same sublime language of adoration.

Love finds her God by springing up towards Him; humility meets Him in the depths of her lowliness. Both are detached from creatures; love raising herself above them into a sphere where she rules them, humility condescending to them and touching them with her disdain. Universal submission is a feature of love as of humility: to the one it is a matter of justice, to the other of affection.

I. *Their common aim: the glory of God.*—Love desires the good of her God, and here on earth we call it His glory. Everything must contribute to it, all that is in my heart, everything I do, everything I wish for—all for His glory, that in everything it may be enhanced. It alone should reign in the universe; and there is not an atom that may not become a voice to proclaim it, a means of serving it, and an ornament to embellish it.

Its dangerous rival is the exaltation of the human *me*, pride. When I am exalted in my own eyes, or when I hanker for the esteem of others, I consider only myself; I forget God, and I do not think of His glory. If my soul is mediocre, it is content with pleasing self; if it is great, it will wish to raise itself higher than others, and will waste its powers in the torments of ambition or envy. Paltry pride fills existence with vanity; a haughty pride wrecks it. An avenging humility drives out these usurpers. If thou art naught, and evil, give up thy ridiculous pretensions! A being

endowed with reason has no right to degrade it with self-seeking; its duty is to tend towards kindness, greatness, and infinite perfection. It is its rightful aim as a creature, and the supreme occupation for its activity.

It is the superior element that makes for sanctity here below and beatification in heaven.

O humility, when thou castest out the idol, thou dost not leave the temple empty. In the place of the troublesome self thou forbiddest me to serve, thou settest God and His glory.

It is true that thou dost abase thyself, but it is only to take a more vigorous flight upwards, and if thou contemnest thyself, it is in order to be free.

Inseparable companions in the earthly combat, humility and love could not conquer except by this close alliance: the death of the one would bring ruin to the other. Without humility love would vanish in illusion; without love, humility would sink under the weight of its lowliness. But united, these two sentiments give to God His greatest glory by the sacrifice of everything that exalts the human personality. They place on the altar both the esteem of men and that which is inclined to attract it—talent, success, and even that lawful honour which may be sacrificed to God alone. Humility furnishes the victim, love the sacred fire. Humility is the judge who pronounces the sentence, love the sword that executes it, for love alone is strong as death; and if sometimes the heavenly Master stays the sword and releases the victim, as He did in Abraham's case, if He allows the soul to wear the aureole of general admiration, she bears it as something that is not her own.

Thus through love humility attains the lowest depths of its ambition : annihilation.

Thus through humility, love is enabled to offer to God a victim worthy, if it is possible, of His Infinity.

II. *Their common origin: the vision of God.*—A sentiment grows from the motive power which inspires it. Love finds its motive in the Amiability of God : this it is that she envisages and is enamoured with. Towards It she springs, and she soars higher in proportion as It manifests Its attractions more clearly. Love increases with sight and is raised to ever loftier regions.

Whether this love is a holy passion that carries us away, or remains a simple love of the will that displays itself in its choice, it is none the less a disinterested sentiment, for such is its essence : holy passion or voluntary choice, both have in view only the Divine Amiability.

Perfect humility also makes the same Divine Beauty the object of her abasements. In face of the Divine Greatness of which she has caught a glimpse, a soul feels herself infinitely little ; before the Supreme Authority she bows herself in complete submission.

Once the deep and mighty agency of God, the mysterious and actual source of all good, is revealed to her faith, she will seek in vain for anything on which to found her pretensions.

Nothing really belongs to the creature, for nothingness and sin have no positive being.

Now with the effacement of everything earthly, the Divine Being is displayed in all His magnificence.

I cannot, then, contemplate Thee, O my God, in Thy marvellous attributes, without feeling this double

sentiment of humility and love. They are born of the same regard, dilate at the same surprises, and mutually increase and complete each other. Every ascent of the one carries the other higher. Love says: "How beautiful is God!" Humility responds: "Beside Him, how vile I am!" Love says, "He loves me!" and humility exclaims: "Can He?" Then love bends down to explain everything: "See, He is as good as He is beautiful; He takes no count of our littleness; He is satisfied with what we are able to give Him."

Humility, raising her head: "Then we must love Him more! The debasement in which I see myself, and that makes me fear, the faults that fill my life and that might close His Heart to me—all these miseries that are my very self become motives of love! What! am I truly loved thus? It is natural to love what is beautiful and pure, but what goodness must that be that can love without these things, and even in spite of ugliness and ingratitude?"

Love: "O Humility, my sister, there are then depths of goodness that without thee I should never have guessed; thou enlargest my vision; and what I see wounds my heart with the desire to love more. Wilt thou that we should love Him together?"

Humility: "O divine Love, holy sister of whom I am unworthy, thou wilt transform me in thyself. I remain humility, but I become love. I re-vest myself in thy rich apparel. Beneath it, however, let me keep my rags. Their constant touch upon my flesh will serve to remind me of my native misery, and will give to my features, my voice, and my least actions something of confusion and tenderness."

Love: "And such an expression and tone of voice



I, too, will adopt, for they are pleasing to God, and protect from the admiration of men. I too will descend into thy littleness, that all self-complacence may be lost; and to thwart vain esteem, so long as I am in the world I will walk hidden beneath thy cloak."

Humility: "Then thou wilt cast me aside in heaven as the traveller throws off the cloak that was his shelter on the journey!"

Love: "Oh no! I will transform thee; thou wilt become beatific adoration, the golden mantle that in heaven clothes anew the nothing!"

## GENERAL EXAMINATION

WHAT esteem and what desire have we for humility? Do we understand that humility alone can give to the soul the capacity to receive and to preserve all the other virtues? Is humility something for which we are most accustomed to pray? Do we often make it the subject of our meditations, our reading, and our self-examination?

Among the many means of acquiring humility, is there one that we have employed with perseverance? When we are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, when we possess It in our hearts, do we seek to make our own the ineffable humility of Jesus in the Host and His communicative sweetness?

Do we regard the humiliations that come to us either from our neighbour or from ourselves as so many precious and providential opportunities of advancing ourselves in the science of humility? Are we per-



suaded that what appear to be our best actions are too often spoilt by some one of our secret evil inclinations?

How do we support the blow to our self-love when we perceive that our reputation is questioned or endangered? Does our peace remain untroubled, or do we lose it when we discover what we really are and of how little value?

Again, are we not more anxious to hide than to conquer our faults?

Do we willingly converse with people of an inferior condition? Whither do our sympathies instinctively turn—towards simple, modest souls, or towards bold spirits who are always sure of themselves? As a rule do we not like what is distinguished, solely because it removes us from the commonplace, the vulgar, as we sometimes contemptuously call it? In our manner of speaking and acting, do we never put on airs that in others we should think ridiculous? Do we realise that the spirit of the Gospel requires that a Christian shall be simple in his mode of life, his dress, his food, and in everything in which worldly people are ostentatious?

Do we never acquiesce in that universal conspiracy against truth that is entered into for the satisfaction of the vanity of human nature? Is it repugnant to us to offer and to receive those lying flatteries that society people interchange?

Do we love to do good in secret? While yet fulfilling the duty of edification, do we keep ourselves in the spirit of our Lord's counsel, when He said, "When ye pray, enter into your closet, . . . and the Father Who seeth in secret shall reward you openly"? Do we not sometimes fall into the deplorable habit

that some have of speaking of our works of zeal, as much from self-satisfaction as for the sake of talking?

Have we preserved our humility in times of consolation and spiritual progress, and in the success of our work? When these rare joys are wanting, do we content ourselves with the witness of our conscience? Are we able to pass a long time without any exterior sign of the approbation of others? Have we not combatted our depression and discouragement with a complacent regard of the advantageous aspects of our personality?

Has the distrust of our own powers been the prelude of a great confidence in God? Do we never use our humility as a pretext for laziness, wasting time in bemoaning our incapacity instead of improving ourselves by work and generous sacrifice?

Do we disguise under the name of humility a disposition to a sullen temper and ennui with ourselves and our duties? Is it not also a false humility that keeps us from appearing when we should? that sometimes even leads us to shut ourselves up in isolation against the insults of the world?

Is not our timidity simply disguised self-love? When it would be useful and charitable to speak of what concerns us, has there been no affectation in our modesty?

Are our sentiments of humility sufficiently supernatural to keep us always gentle and patient under our incurable miseries?

How do we accept the occasions when our mistakes and defects are shown up, and are made the subject of criticisms, jests, and disparagement?

Are we equally indifferent to praise and blame? Rather, is not our self-love wounded by any little sharp word or slight want of consideration? Is not the regret we feel for our sins in great measure due to shame and vexation? Is it not for want of humility that we know neither how to rise again when we have fallen, nor how afterwards to turn our faults to good account? that we seek to give undue weight to extenuating circumstances to others, to ourselves, and even to our director?

Have we a holy fear of presumption when it is required of us to reprimand, direct, command, and officially to be always in the right?

Is not our opinion of ourselves too often in direct opposition to the spirit of S. Paul when he said, "I am the first of sinners"; or of S. Vincent de Paul, "I am worse than all the demons"; or of other Saints: "Among the servants of the good God, I am the least of the least"?

Do we fully realise the need of prayer before action, and of thanksgiving after action?

Finding our actual responsibility already very heavy, have we no other ambition than that of fulfilling as well as possible the duties of our present position? If our duties are modest, do we consider them above what we are worth?

Do we love to work in subordination, to keep for ourselves the most laborious tasks, and to efface ourselves at the moment of fruition, giving to others the merit and praises?

Do we remain calm when we fancy that our superiors are forgetting or slighting us? Do we speak of them only with respect, even when they cause us some pain?

How do we receive their rebukes, or even their simple observations?

Is it with answers, excuses, and murmurs? or rather with sincere promises to try to please them better in future? Are we not excessively jealous of our personal independence?

Do we observe the general rule of only speaking good of our neighbour? Do we force ourselves to have as good an opinion of him as possible?

Do we make up our minds not to think of his imperfections? Do we refuse to judge him? Have we rid ourselves of the spirit of contradiction? Are we disinclined to argument? Do we interrupt others or do we know how to keep a discreet silence? Do we willingly give up what is best and most desirable to others? Do we show constant kindly attention to everyone, inspired either by respect for them or by the sincere sense of our own inferiority?

Is there in us any of that domineering and self-sufficient spirit before which everyone must give way? Like our Divine Master, do we bear gently with those who do not listen to us, with those who contradict us, with those who misinterpret our intentions, who deny us our requests, who scoff at our advice, who treat us disrespectfully or even disdainfully?

When we think ourselves to be victims of malice or injustice, do we not repel those who have wounded us with anger and impatience? While our Lord was silent before hatred and calumny—*Jesus autem tacebat*—do we not often fall into one of these three faults: revenge, shown in spiteful words or cutting jests; a lasting feeling of bitterness entertained towards our aggressors; or discouragement?

Cruel as our trials may be, do we realise that, as sinners, we deserve even worse treatment? Have we excused our enemies and prayed for them to God?

Are we resolved to abandon ourselves henceforth into the hands of our heavenly Father, that we may live and die in His blessed peace?

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THESE EXERCISES

### I

1. First make your resolutions: What have I to reform? What have I to acquire? By what means?

2. Choose some consideration that impresses you, and that will help your thoughts upwards, such as: the Infinity of God in contrast with your nothingness; the intimate life of Jesus in you; or even a recollection of some humiliating faults; or yet again, the thought of your obvious inferiority on some point, etc.

3. Concentrate your effort on some very efficacious practice, such as: adoring God profoundly before every prayer; making yourself always appear humble and tranquil, even when alone; moderating your movements, your answers, the tone of your voice; applying yourself to listen to others, etc.

4. Resolve to assent to every requirement, such as: privations, prayers, a detailed self-accusation in confession.

Note again each evening all your omissions.

## II

Next spend some moments in looking through this volume again. Make a note of those meditations and counsels that seem to you most useful to return to either each week or each month.

This advice is very important; details are lost, impressions fade, emotion cools. To become humble is a very lengthy task. Return to this book often, you will never take it up again without profit.

## III

In order worthily to conclude these exercises, try to think of something more that you may do to mark the occasion.

Prepare yourself with extra care for your Communion, and make a longer thanksgiving than usual. Let Jesus so take possession of you that you bear Him with you wherever you go.

If you can, place some flowers and a lighted lamp before a statue or picture of Him.

Make your visit to the Blessed Sacrament an act of great solemnity; show yourself more recollected and serious. Go as near to the altar as possible, so near that, speaking in a low voice, Jesus and you could hear each other if God permitted it. Then recite slowly and from your heart the following prayer :

## BEFORE THE TABERNACLE

At the close of these meditations, throughout which the memory of Thee has followed me, behold me here again at Thy Feet. I cannot see with my bodily eyes the crib where Thy humility was born, the poor dwell-

ing in Nazareth where, for thirty years, it grew in obscurity, the Calvary that crowned it with opprobrium and shame. But why should I go so far to seek it when I have it close at hand? Why should there be memories of Thee, O Jesus, when I have Thee Thyself, God, annihilated here perhaps more than anywhere else? Oh! give me to understand Thy Eucharist!

The simple and kind humility that makes itself all to all is what strikes me first. Thou lovest beautiful cathedrals that offer Thee the riches of the city; but Thou lovest just as well the poor churches of the country, built by the peasants' sweat; Thou dost even accommodate Thyself to the roof of a cottage or the hut of a savage. Here, flowers, brilliant lights, harmonies floating upwards under great vaults, fervent crowds; yonder, some smoky candles, unmusical voices, a few distracted worshippers! Thy great Heart, O Jesus, looks beyond these things. It sees in them only the expression of feeling; It is pleased with what is offered when we give what we can.

Here some ignorant and simple souls offer Thee vocal prayers, too often mere expressions of the lips; elsewhere, souls of higher culture make the sweet melody of interior prayers heard in Thine ears; Thy great Heart cares only for the sentiment, It is pleased with what each one tells It, when we say what we know how to say.

\* \* \*

O Jesus! what a touching lesson: if I am to be like Thee in everything I must be humble. There are so many different ways by which the heart expresses



itself; there are so many little forgetfulnesses that we must not resent too much!

If I contemplate Thee Thyself, I discover a more profound humility. Nothing shows me Thy Person, nothing betrays Thy Presence, no light shines upon my eyes, no murmur makes itself heard; not a quiver stirs the sacred species that contain Thy living Self. When my faith seeks Thee it finds Thee reduced in such wise as to amaze it.

What! for Thy risen Body, the glorious companion of Thy beauteous Soul, august Temple of Thy Divinity, for Thy Eucharistic Being, only the tiny space of a tabernacle! What do I say? Of a ciborium! Again what do I say? Of a morsel of bread?—for even the very smallest Host that is given to us, divided a hundred times, will in each fragment contain Thee, Thou Who art so great! Here Thou art, then, quite small, without any appearance, reduced to nothing; Thou hast no voice, Thou remainest motionless; we may carry Thee whither we desire: Thy Eucharistic existence depends upon our will!

\* \* \*

O Jesus, when my reputation is injured, my activity limited, my resources diminished, even my faculties crippled, I will fix my gaze on the profound peace of Thy tabernacle where Thy humility reigns.

But what do I see? The shame of the past pursues Thee even to this retreat, where Thou hidest Thyself in such lowly guise; it does not recoil before Thy trustful self-surrender. Impiety denies or insults Thee; the careless lay Thee upon torn or soiled linen, like a poor man on his pallet; Thou givest Thyself to the indifferent; Thou dost not refuse to enter the

offensive mouth of the sick; Thou dost not even thrust back the sacrilegious; Thou art the humble man Whom nothing disgusts! Unable, without continual miracles, to prevent these infamies, the sad result of human liberty, Thou dost bear them bravely, that Thou mayest reach the hearts that love Thee! Our love is more dear to Thee than Thy dignity!

\* \* \*

O Jesus, if someone is thoughtless, inconsiderate, or ungrateful towards me; if, wrongly or by mischance, cruel humiliations are imposed upon me, I will carry myself smiling through these trials, walking towards Thee!

\* \* \*

O Jesus, by the Holy Communion Thou dost belong to me and I to Thee. If we are thus one, who shall separate us? Thou wilt follow me then through life, communicating to me unceasingly Thy spirit of indulgence, of effacement, of constant kindness, the sweet fruits of humility.

And I, I will see myself in every earthly tabernacle, near Thee, happy in this intimacy, confused by this glory. I will keep myself there with Thee in silent adoration, and when I go away again it will be only, like Thee, to give myself to others for Thy sake.

\* \* \*

O Jesus, if Thou hadst been less annihilated, Thou wouldest have adored Thy Father less profoundly; O Jesus! if Thou hadst made Thyself less small, I should never have been able to contain Thee! What kindness! what wisdom! what a lesson!









Beaudenom, Leopold, 1840-  
1916.

The path of humility

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